

**DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

**CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING AND CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR:  
CONSUMER SCEPTICISM AS A MODERATOR AND BRAND EQUITY AS MEDIATOR**

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**CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING AND CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR: CONSUMER  
SCEPTICISM AS A MODERATOR AND BRAND EQUITY AS MEDIATOR**

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Date: 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2025

## **DECLARATION**

I, George Dominic Ewur, declare that this thesis is original, and all the contents are appropriately acknowledged and explicitly referenced. A bibliography is appended to the thesis. Furthermore, it represents my opinions, not necessarily those of the Durban University of Technology.

I also certify that the thesis has not heretofore been submitted in any of its parts or entirety for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences specialising in Marketing in any other institution of higher learning locally or internationally.

I hereby permit my work to be available for photocopying and/or re-printing, for inter-library loan, and for the title and abstract of this thesis to be made available to other educational institutions and students.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour in Ghana, using brand equity as a mediator and consumer scepticism as a moderator. With increased use of CRM strategies by companies aiming to boost sales and enhance brand image, it is essential to understand the factors shaping consumer reactions in this emerging market context.

Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through convenience sampling from shoppers at two major retail malls in different locations. The collected data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling to test the proposed relationships.

The findings indicate that CRM has a positive impact on consumer purchasing behaviour, but this effect is significantly weakened when consumer scepticism is high. Brand equity plays a crucial mediating role by fostering positive consumer perceptions of CRM, thus enhancing purchase intentions. The study underscores the importance of aligning corporate social initiatives closely with core brand identity and adapting CRM strategies to local cultural contexts, particularly in global marketing efforts.

Additionally, the study highlights the need for regulatory frameworks to standardize CRM disclosure practices and stresses the importance of consumer education to build trust and engagement in CRM initiatives.

By addressing this gap in literature on CRM in emerging economies, this research provides practical insights for businesses seeking to optimize socially conscious marketing. Theoretically, it integrates attribution theory with Aaker's brand equity model to deepen understanding of the psychological mechanisms influencing consumer responses to CRM. This study offers direction for future research and guidance for CRM implementation in emerging markets.

**KEY WORDS: Cause-Related Marketing; Brand Equity; Purchasing Behaviour; Consumer Scepticism; Attribution Theory; Ghana**

## **DEDICATION**

*I especially dedicate this effort to the following individuals who have helped and inspired me to finish this study:*

*My beautiful wife, Janet, and our daughters, Elisa, Elvina, and Elfreda*

*My late father Samuel and my parents Grace*

*Even in the face of extreme adversity, my siblings Franklin, Rosemond, Benedict, and Catherine never lost faith in my capacity to complete my assignments.*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

AVE	Average variance extracted
BE	Brand Equity
CRM	Cause-Related Marketing
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DUT	Durban University of Technology
FMCG	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods
GSA	Ghana Standards Authority
NCA	National Communications Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PI	Purchase Intention
PLS-SEM	Partial least squares and structural equation modelling
SME	Small and Medium Size Firm
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This study investigates the impact of cause-related marketing (CRM) on consumer purchasing behaviour in Ghana, with a particular emphasis on brand equity as a mediator and consumer scepticism as a moderator. Academically, it contributes to the expanding body of literature on marketing tactics in emerging markets by filling a knowledge gap about how CRM works in Ghana's specific socioeconomic and cultural setting.

The study is theoretically based on fundamental marketing and consumer behaviour frameworks, including the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Brand Equity Theory. CRM activities enhance customer loyalty and brand perception by examining brand equity as a mediating element. Furthermore, analysing customer scepticism as a moderating variable reveals potential limitations to CRM efficacy, resulting in a more nuanced view of consumer trust in socially responsible marketing.

Conceptually, this study combines CRM, brand equity, and consumer scepticism to provide a holistic model that describes the situations under which CRM influences purchase intention. The study's focus on Ghana, an emerging market with shifting consumer expectations and trust issues, has significant ramifications for businesses hoping to implement successful CRM strategies in similar circumstances. This chapter introduces the study, explores the background of the study, outlines the problem statement, and states the research aim and objectives, as well as the research questions. It also discusses the significance of the study, an overview of methodology, limitations of the study and delimitations as well. The chapter further discusses ethical procedures applied to the study as well as the organization of the study.

### 1.2 Background of the study

A vital strategy for companies looking to increase their market presence is cause-related marketing or CRM while simultaneously contributing to social causes. A company and a non-profit organisation work together to promote a social cause and make money through CRM, a marketing strategy. CRM seeks to establish a situation in which the brand and the cause it supports benefit from one another (Fan *et al.* 2020). This strategy not only promotes a

favourable company image but also emotionally connects with customers, which may have an impact on their purchasing decisions (Thomas *et al.*, 2022).

In recent years, the effectiveness of CRM has been the subject of extensive research, particularly concerning its impact on consumer purchasing behaviour. Studies show that consumers are more likely to support brands that address social issues, and many are even willing to move to brands that exhibit corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Schamp *et al.* 2023; Moni *et al.* 2021). However, many variables affect the intricate interaction between CRM and consumer behaviour, such as brand equity (BE) and consumer cynicism.

CRM has gained popularity since American Express introduced it in 1981 as a practical marketing tool for improving business performance and supporting deserving charities. CRM holds a unique position in the field of socially responsive marketing campaigns because of its widespread use, history in the market, and approval by all interested parties (Christofi *et al.* 2020a). However, most CRM research is being conducted in wealthy nations like the USA, the UK, and Europe (Bhatti *et al.*, 2023). The expansion of CRM activities abroad warrants further study in this field, especially in developing nations like Ghana, where CRM initiatives are still in their infancy.

CRM in recent times has become a widely used tactic by businesses all over the world to simultaneously engage customers, set themselves apart from the competition, and improve society (Ferraris *et al.* 2020; Singh and Pathak 2020). To improve brand image and customer loyalty, corporate businesses associate themselves with social concerns. This marketing strategy aims to improve society as well (Le 2023; Tiep Le *et al.* 2023). Although CRM has been thoroughly examined in several settings, little is known about how it affects consumer choice, especially in the Ghanaian market (Dubiel and Mukherji, 2022; Ofori-Okyere *et al.*, 2023). Ghana offers a distinctive environment for comprehending consumer behaviour and marketing dynamics. According to Yawson and Yamoah (2022), Ghana is a dynamic and rapidly evolving market in West Africa. As a result, its expanding economy and knowledgeable clientele make it a desirable location for studying the connection between CRM campaigns and consumer purchase intentions. (Awadzie *et al.* 2023).

Linking their brands to social causes like poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability enables businesses to improve their brand's perception, build emotional bonds with customers, and eventually influence purchases. However, several variables, such as the level of consumer scepticism, the cause's perceived validity, and the sincerity of the brand's dedication, may affect how successful CRM campaigns are in changing consumer behaviour (Lopes et al., 2023).

One important way that CRM campaigns can impact consumer purchase decisions is by using BE (Furman and Maison 2020). BE encompasses people's perceptions, associations, and attitudes about a brand that reflect its overall value and competitive advantage. (2023 Aro *et al.*; 2021 Tran et al.). When firms use intelligent CRM programs, they may increase customer preference, brand trust, and brand loyalty. This positively affects consumers' propensity for purchasing (Tiep *et al.*, 2023).

The propensity to doubt the intentions supporting the brand's CRM initiatives, known as consumer scepticism can significantly moderate the effectiveness of such marketing strategies (Lii and Lee 2012). Sceptical customers could question whether a brand's dedication to a cause is sincere, which can hinder their willingness to engage with the brand, even if the cause is genuinely worthy. Conversely, BE can mediate the connection between CRM and customer buying patterns (Aaker 1991). Strong brand equity can improve consumer perception and trust, increasing their openness to CRM initiatives.

This study explores the intricate dynamics between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour, concentrating on BE's mediating function and consumer scepticism's moderating function in the Ghanaian setting. In understanding these relationships, marketers can better design CRM campaigns that resonate with consumers and drive purchasing behaviour, particularly in emerging markets like Ghana, where consumer awareness and expectations regarding CSR are evolving (Ghana Statistical Service 2022).

In investigating these processes, the study seeks to advance both theoretical understanding and real-world applications in the fields associated with marketing and the behaviour of consumers. The concept of CRM emphasises how crucial CSR programmes are influencing the attitudes and dispositions of consumers (Suryavanshi *et al.* 2023). The purpose of the current research

was to better understand the mechanisms underlying Ghanaian consumers' responses to CRM initiatives. Furthermore, it provides valuable perspectives for practitioners, politicians, and marketers interested in using CRM's potential to achieve positive social and economic outcomes.

Cause-related marketing (CRM) has gained popularity worldwide as a strategic technique for improving brand perception and influencing customer purchase decisions. However, its efficacy differs between markets due to variances in economic systems, cultural values, and customer trust (Suryavanshi *et al.* 2024). In emerging markets such as Ghana, where customers may be sceptical of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, the impact of CRM on purchasing behaviour must be examined further (Majeed, 2022). Existing research focuses mostly on developed economies, leaving a gap in our understanding of how CRM works in markets with changing customer expectations and trust dynamics (Pfajfar *et al.* 2022).

This study posits brand equity (BE) as an important mediator in the CRM-consumer purchasing behaviour interaction, arguing that good CRM activities boost brand equity, which promotes purchase intention. Consumer scepticism, particularly in emerging countries, might modulate this relationship, reducing or strengthening CRM's impact on brand equity and consumer responses. By combining these characteristics, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of how CRM works in Ghana and other similar markets. The findings will provide theoretical insights into CRM's success in a variety of market scenarios, as well as practical implications for organisations looking to improve their social responsibility marketing tactics.

CRM's impact in Ghana is underexplored, needing more research into how it influences consumer purchasing behaviour. Given Ghana's shifting consumer market, where trust in corporate social programs is not always guaranteed, understanding the factors that drive or impede CRM performance is critical (Mahmoud *et al.* 2024). According to this study, brand equity (BE) plays a key role as a mediator in the relationship between CRM and customer purchasing behaviour. This suggests that when CRM initiatives are carried out effectively, brand perceptions are enhanced, which in turn increases purchase intentions. However, consumer suspicion can act as a moderating factor, potentially reducing the positive effects of CRM, particularly in emerging markets where there is still a high level of scepticism regarding

corporate objectives (Nguyen et al. 2023). Some campaigns, like specific charitable promotions in the banking and telecommunications industries in Ghana, have drawn criticism because of alleged discrepancies between corporate actions and CSR messaging, while Vodafone Ghana's (Telecel's) "Kindred Hearts" initiative, which aids impoverished children, has garnered positive feedback, other campaigns such as certain charitable promotions in the telecommunications and banking sectors, have faced scepticism due to perceived inconsistencies between CSR messaging and corporate actions (Torbor et al. 2025).

This study offers a comprehensive view of how CRM methods work or fail in Ghana by examining actual situations such as these. The results will provide firms with useful tactics for putting into practice more successful, trust-building CRM projects while also providing theoretical insights into the relationship between CRM, brand equity, and consumer scepticism. A popular tactic for raising customer involvement and brand impression is cause-related marketing, or CRM. Its efficacy varies per market, though, depending on things like consumer confidence, the state of the economy and cultural perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Ghana's distinct market features make it a perfect place to study the intricate relationships between CRM, brand equity (BE), and customer scepticism.

Ghana is a developing market that has seen quick economic expansion, heightened brand competition, and changing consumer demands for corporate social responsibility. Ghanaian customers are usually open to socially conscious firms, but they are also becoming increasingly sceptical of CSR programs and frequently doubt the sincerity of business intentions. Inconsistent brand messaging, broken CSR pledges, and cases of corporate wrongdoing all contribute to this scepticism. Academics and practitioners must comprehend how CRM builds brand equity in such a setting and whether consumer scepticism mitigates this relationship. Furthermore, Ghana's market is characterized by a mix of multinational and local brands employing CRM strategies with varying degrees of success. For example, MTN Ghana's corporate social initiatives in education and healthcare have contributed to strong brand loyalty, whereas scepticism has undermined similar efforts by other brands perceived as engaging in "CSR-washing." By analysing these dynamics, this study provides a clearer understanding of how CRM strategies can build or erode consumer trust, ultimately influencing purchase decisions.

In addition to addressing a vacuum in the literature on CRM in emerging economies, this study will provide useful advice for companies looking to maximise their socially conscious marketing initiatives. The study offers a thorough framework for evaluating CRM success in Ghana and other comparable markets by combining scepticism as a moderator with BE as a mediator.

Though its efficacy varies depending on the market situation, cause-related marketing (CRM) has been extensively researched as a strategic technique for influencing consumer purchase behaviour. The dynamics of CRM need more research in emerging countries like Ghana, where customer trust, business openness, and economic realities differ from those in industrialised economies (Hinson et al. 2024). With consumer scepticism as a moderating factor—a viewpoint that has received little attention in the context of emerging markets (Malhotra and Fatehpuria 2024), this study investigates how brand equity (BE) mediates the relationship between CRM and purchase intention.

Consumer reactions to marketing initiatives, including CRM, are significantly influenced by brand equity (BE). Brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty are the components of BE, according to Aaker (1991), and they all influence customer purchasing decisions. According to research, CRM can improve BE by fortifying brand linkages with social responsibility, which will raise customer loyalty and perceived value (Suryavanshi et al., 2024; Keller, 1993; Hoeffler and Keller, 2002). CRM may be especially useful in boosting BE, which in turn affects purchase intention, in emerging economies where consumers are placing a higher value on ethical and socially conscious products. However, there hasn't been much research done in emerging nations on BE's mediating role in CRM effectiveness. Strong BE, according to studies conducted in developed markets, increases consumer preference and trust in a brand, which in turn increases purchase intention (Husain, Ahmad and Khan 2022; Vo Minh et al.2022).

However, studies conducted in developing nations such as South Africa and India indicate that the growth of BE through CRM may be uneven because of differences in consumer awareness of CSR programs and business credibility (Sharma, 2025; Fatma et al., 2021). Given Ghana's changing market, where both local and international firms use CRM, more research is needed to determine BE's mediating function in the interaction between CRM and customer purchasing

behaviour. The success of CRM campaigns can be greatly impacted by consumer scepticism, which is described as scepticism about the corporate motivations underlying social responsibility activities (Thomas et al., 2024). High levels of scepticism may reduce the benefits of CRM by decreasing consumer trust and raising views of corporate self-interest, according to studies (Wang et al. 2025). On the other hand, customers are more likely to view CRM as a sincere commitment to social good when scepticism is low, which boosts brand equity and encourages buy intention.

Consumer scepticism regarding CRM is still a little-studied topic in emerging nations. According to earlier studies, scepticism is frequently stronger in markets with inadequate corporate governance frameworks, opaque prior CSR initiatives, or perceptions of corporations exploiting social concerns exclusively for financial gain (Conte et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2022). Inconsistent corporate pledges to social activities are a contributing factor to scepticism in Ghana (Kasimba and Lujala 2021). While some businesses, like MTN Ghana's educational programs, have successfully gained trust through consistent CSR participation, others have faced criticism for what is seen as their perceived lack of sincerity. It is crucial for both academic research and managerial practice to comprehend how scepticism moderates the CRM-BE-purchase intention link in this particular setting.

Although CRM has been thoroughly researched in developed markets, less is known about how effective it is in emerging economies, especially when it comes to the interaction between BE and scepticism (Raji et al., 2025; Thomas et al., 2024). This study examines how scepticism and BE mediate and moderate the link between CRM and customer buying behaviour in Ghana to bridge this gap. Theoretical contributions to marketing literature and practical insights for businesses operating in expanding areas are also provided, ensuring that CRM programs are planned to maximise consumer trust and brand loyalty.

Cause-related marketing (CRM) has garnered a lot of attention as a way to align brands with social causes to influence consumer purchasing behaviour. However, the effectiveness of CRM varies depending on factors like consumer scepticism and brand equity (BE), especially in emerging markets like Ghana (Effah and Hinson 2022; Amoako et al. 2024). This study uses established theoretical frameworks to examine the relationship between CRM and purchase intention, with scepticism acting as a moderator and BE acting as a mediator. Situating this

research within the frameworks of Aaker's (1991) Brand Equity Theory and Lii and Lee's (2012) conceptualisation of consumer scepticism in CSR, the study expands on existing knowledge and applies it to new markets.

According to Aaker (1991), Brand Equity Theory (BE) is a multifaceted concept that includes perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand associations, and brand awareness. Since successful CRM programs can strengthen brand associations with positive social values, boost perceived brand legitimacy, and cultivate customer loyalty, this paradigm is essential for understanding how CRM affects consumer behaviour. Strong BE has been shown to significantly influence purchase intention in previous studies (Nguyen-Viet, 2022; Verma, 2021), especially when customers believe that a brand's social responsibility efforts are genuine.

The contribution of BE to CRM effectiveness is still not well understood in developing nations like Ghana (Kodua et al. 2022). Due to a lack of customer understanding and trust, local firms frequently find it difficult to convert social responsibility initiatives into strong BE, even if global brands like MTN Ghana have effectively used CRM to increase brand trust and loyalty. By investigating how CRM initiatives affect BE in an emerging market and answering the question of whether improved BE amplifies the influence of CRM on purchase intention in a country where consumer trust is still growing, this study expands on Aaker's (1991) paradigm.

Consumer scepticism about corporate social responsibility (CSR) is viewed by Lii and Lee (2012) as a moderating factor in how consumers react to CSR initiatives. According to their research, customers are more likely to view CSR programs as profit-driven rather than truly altruistic when scepticism is strong, which can lessen the intended benefits of CRM. CRM initiatives, on the other hand, are more likely to increase consumer trust and brand credibility when scepticism is low (Thomas et al., 2024). Scepticism about corporate objectives is still an issue in Ghana because some companies engage in "CSR-washing," which makes social initiatives seem theatrical rather than genuine (Van Hierden, Dietrich and Rundle-Thiele, 2021). While some companies have successfully integrated long-term CSR commitments, such as Vodafone Ghana's "Kindred Hearts" campaign, others have come under fire for allegedly having conflicting social responsibility declarations. Using Lii and Lee's (2012) scepticism paradigm, this study investigates how customer scepticism moderates the link between CRM

and BE to determine if scepticism reduces or boosts the benefits of CRM in an emerging market context.

Fewer studies have looked at CRM's efficacy in emerging markets, where consumer scepticism and brand perception are influenced by various socioeconomic circumstances (Moharam and Yacout, 2024; Pandey et al. 2024), despite earlier research on the topic's influence on consumer behaviour in developed economies (e.g., Deb, Sharma, and Amawate, 2021; Amawate and Deb 2021). Integrating Aaker's (1991) and Lii and Lee's (2012) frameworks, this study builds on previous research by examining how BE mediates and how scepticism moderates CRM effectiveness in Ghana. Thereby offering a more sophisticated perspective on CRM's function in developing markets, contributing both theoretically to marketing research and practically to firms looking to maximise CRM tactics in settings where trust is crucial. Cause-related marketing, or CRM, has emerged as a key tactic for companies looking to sway customer decisions by supporting social causes. However, its efficacy differs from market to market and is impacted by elements including customer scepticism and brand equity (BE) (Effah and Hinson 2022; Amoako et al. 2024). Knowing how CRM influences consumer behaviour is essential in Ghana, an expanding market with changing consumer expectations, financial limitations, and worries about company transparency. With BE acting as a mediator and scepticism acting as a moderator, this study attempts to assess the influence of CRM on purchase behaviour to shed more light on this complex relationship.

A key factor in customer decision-making, brand equity (BE) affects trust, preference, and intention to buy (Shrestha et al., 2023). The four components of BE—brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty—are based on Aaker's (1991) Brand Equity Theory. According to this study, buying intention is strengthened when CRM improves BE. CRM's capacity to improve BE in Ghana, where a large number of consumers respect CSR but are also wary of brand legitimacy, depends on how well it is implemented. Multinational companies like MTN Ghana, for instance, have effectively incorporated long-term social activities (such as educational support programs) to develop BE and reinforce favourable brand connotations. CRM increases perceived brand value and builds trust in these situations, which raises purchase intention (Pereira et al., 2024). On the other hand, CRM initiatives may be less effective at fostering BE and, in turn, influencing consumer behaviour if they come across as erratic or opportunistic (Wang et al. 2025).

This study, therefore, postulates that BE functions as a mediating variable, i.e., that CRM enhances BE rather than directly influencing purchase intention. Customers are more inclined to interact with a company and make more purchases if it successfully matches its CRM endeavours with their expectations and cultivates a strong, trustworthy brand image. CRM has the potential to improve BE, but to what extent depends on consumer scepticism, which varies greatly in Ghana. According to Lii and Lee (2012), consumer scepticism is the propensity of consumers to question the authenticity of corporate social activities. Various obstacles, such as inconsistent CSR commitments, perceptions of "CSR-washing," and previous business failures to fulfil social claims, contribute to scepticism towards CRM in Ghana.

According to this study, customer scepticism can either amplify or diminish the impact of CRM on BE, acting as a moderating variable. Customers are more likely to view CRM initiatives as genuine when scepticism is low, which supports BE and favourably affects purchase intention. However, a high level of scepticism can undermine trust, diminishing BE's mediating role and CRM's ability to influence consumer behaviour. Examples of this include situations where brands are seen as taking advantage of social concerns for financial gain without demonstrating a sincere commitment. Given its consistency and long-term dedication, Vodafone Ghana's (Telecel) "Kindred Hearts" initiative, for instance, has been well received. However, other brands that run short-term or poorly communicated CSR campaigns may encounter scepticism, which would have a smaller impact on BE and, in turn, less influence over consumer behaviour.

This study combines scepticism as a moderator with BE as a mediator to produce a thorough framework for comprehending CRM's efficacy in Ghana:

1. CRM → BE → Purchase Intention: CRM improves BE, which raises purchase intention.
2. CRM × Scepticism → BE → Purchase Intention: A high level of scepticism reduces the influence of CRM on purchasing behaviour by weakening the CRM-BE link. Low scepticism, on the other hand, makes this association stronger. This study expands prior CRM research into an emerging market environment where confidence in corporate social responsibility programs is still developing by utilising Lii and Lee, (2012) scepticism framework and Aaker's (1991) Brand Equity Theory. Both theoretical contributions to marketing literature and useful information for companies looking to use CRM tactics that successfully boost BE while reducing scepticism will be provided by the findings. For brands operating in Ghana and

comparable countries, where customer trust is crucial to CRM's performance, it is vital to comprehend these aspects.

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is becoming a more popular tactic for firms seeking to improve brand perception and impact consumer purchase behaviour. However, its success is not assured and is influenced by factors such as brand equity (BE) and customer scepticism, especially in emerging countries like Ghana. Given Ghana's quickly changing business climate, where consumers are becoming increasingly discerning and sceptical of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, understanding the factors that promote or impede CRM performance is crucial. This study intends to assess the impact of CRM on purchase behaviour, using BE as a mediator and scepticism as a moderator, and to provide actionable insights for organisations operating in Ghana and similar countries.

Businesses in Ghana are increasingly using CRM as part of their marketing efforts. While some organisations have effectively used CRM to establish strong brand equity and consumer loyalty, others have faced criticism for apparent insincerity. For example, MTN Ghana's long-term investment in educational and healthcare projects has improved brand reputation and consumer trust, resulting in higher customer retention. In contrast, some financial institutions and telecoms companies developed short-lived, publicity-driven CSR programs that were viewed with scepticism, weakening their intended impact.

Similarly, CRM success has been uneven in other emerging markets. In South Africa, companies that failed to align their CRM campaigns with genuine long-term commitments faced consumer distrust, which reduced campaign effectiveness (Moeti, 2022). In Nigeria, Coca-Cola and other brands have successfully used CRM to strengthen their market position through community-centered initiatives. These examples underscore the need for a more thorough understanding of how CRM influences consumer behaviour in Ghana, specifically through the moderating effect of scepticism and the mediating role of BE. The study will shed light on how BE may be improved by CRM, which in turn increases consumer purchase intention. Businesses can use these results to create CRM programs that improve perceived brand quality, strengthen favourable brand associations, and foster enduring customer loyalty. Instead of short-term marketing that might not produce long-term brand value, brands can concentrate on consistent, open, and effectively articulated CRM efforts. The results will

demonstrate how scepticism limits the efficacy of CRM, assisting companies in formulating plans to allay customer scepticism and foster confidence. Through constant contact with customers, guaranteeing transparency in their CSR commitments, and coordinating CRM initiatives with genuine corporate values, businesses can learn to overcome scepticism. For instance, companies can engage customers in the decision-making process and present actual success stories from their CRM projects to build confidence. Businesses can assess whether their CRM efforts improve brand perception or if alternative strategies are required by knowing how BE mediates CRM's impact on purchasing behaviour.

For brands with high levels of consumer scepticism, the study will provide insights on whether it is necessary to first strengthen consumer trust before launching CRM campaigns. The research will assist marketers to be more efficient in allocating resources, ensuring that CRM efforts contribute to long-term brand growth rather than being perceived as merely promotional tactics. This study will also provide Ghanaian businesses with enlightening, fact-based recommendations by examining the relationship between CRM, BE, and scepticism. It will help companies refine their CRM strategies to increase brand value, reduce scepticism, and ultimately impact consumer purchasing decisions. These findings will be important for marketing professionals, brand managers, and corporate strategists who want to build CRM campaigns that engage Ghanaian customers and provide sustainable competitive advantages in the market.

A subject that the brand's customers support is considered socially relevant. The easy accessibility of clean water, improved sanitation facilities, the elimination of extreme poverty and hunger, the fight against non-communicable diseases, sustainability in the environment, and a decrease in mortality among children were the top causes that Ferraris et al. (2020) discovered that their participants were interested in. In the context of Africa, all of these are undoubtedly expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN (van Norren 2022; Nhamo, Dube and Chikodzi 2020) CRM techniques are currently gaining traction in both developed and developing nations due to the growing emphasis on sustainability (Bhatti, Galan-Ladero and Galera-Casquet 2023).

55% of consumers have been willing to pay more for sustainable brands, according to the Nielsen sustainability report 2014 (Aggarwal and Singh 2019). Nevertheless, a thorough

analysis of the CRM literature shows that the majority of CRM research is focused in the United States (Christofi *et al.* 2020a; Park, Hoeffler and Keller 2023; Patel *et al.* 2023; Thomas, Kureshi and Vatawala 2020: 23).

The review of the literature indicates that more research is necessary to address scepticism, particularly in poorer nations where CRM is a relatively new issue (Deb and Amawate, 2020; Chaabouni, Jridi and Bakini 2021; Arslan *et al.* 2020; Chang and Cheng 2015). Moreover, the literature mostly lacks mediating constructs like BE. Given the foregoing, the current study on CRM and customer purchasing behaviour was conducted to fill in the gaps in the literature and context in Ghana. It uses BE as a mediator and scepticism as a moderator. Ghana, a country in West Africa, is experiencing tremendous social and economic change. The Ghanaian market offers a ripe opportunity for companies looking to grow and gain a foothold in the area to take advantage of the country's expanding middle class and rising purchasing power. The dynamics of consumer behaviour and marketing strategies are gaining more attention from scholars as well as practitioners due to socioeconomic development and shifting consumer preferences (Zhang and Chang, 2021). CRM has become a popular tactic used by Ghanaian businesses to promote both positive social change and increased sales in recent years (Akolaa *et al.* 2023).

To produce shared benefits for the firm and society at large, CRM entails aligning corporate brands with social causes (Holiday *et al.* 2021). Companies in Ghana are learning more about CRM's advantages for enhancing societal welfare, fostering customer loyalty, and enhancing brand image (Kodua *et al.* 2022). These benefits range from supporting healthcare and education initiatives to advocating for environmental sustainability and poverty alleviation programmes.

However, research on the impact and effectiveness of CRM efforts on Ghanaian consumers' purchasing behaviour is still lacking (Coffie and Hinson 2021; Twineboah-Koduah and Coffie 2024). Businesses hoping to negotiate the intricacies of the local market and establish deep ties with their target audience must comprehend how Ghanaian consumers view and react to CRM initiatives (Mak *et al.* 2023; Femi-Oladunni *et al.* 2023). The notion of consumer purchasing behaviour, which includes the attitudes, beliefs, and decision-making processes that affect consumers' choices and actions in the marketplace, is at the centre of this study (Lavuri *et al.* 2023). For marketers and companies looking to prosper in this dynamic and cutthroat

environment, understanding the elements that influence customer purchase behaviour is crucial, especially in Ghana, where cultural values, socio-economic considerations, and market dynamics come together.

The analysis is further complicated by the function of BE as a mediator in the connection between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour. Among the intangible assets and associations that consumers associate with a brand are awareness of the brand, perceived premium quality, loyalty to the brand and brand associations. These elements are together referred to as BE (Tasci 2021; Parris and Guzmán 2023). Businesses looking to establish strong, enduring brands in Ghana must comprehend how CRM campaigns affect BE and, in consequence, customer purchase intentions. Additionally, consumer scepticism seems to be a critical component that may lessen the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour. (Fan *et al.* 2020; Schamp *et al.* 2023). Marketing professionals who want to navigate the complexities of consumer perception and behaviour must understand the extent to which Ghanaian consumers show scepticism toward corporate social initiatives in a socio-cultural context where trust and credibility play critical roles in consumer decision-making.

The study aimed to examine the influence of CRM on the purchasing decisions of Ghanaian consumers, with a focus on the mediating function of BE and the moderating effect of consumer scepticism. This study intended to explore these processes to offer significant insights for stakeholders, firms, and policymakers who wish to utilise marketing to promote social good and sustainably growth of their enterprises. In Ghana, it also sought to clarify the fundamental processes influencing how customers respond to CRM initiatives.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

CRM has evolved as a popular technique for brands to identify with social concerns while increasing sales and improving brand image. However, the effectiveness of CRM in influencing consumer purchasing behaviour is contingent upon various factors, including consumer scepticism and BE. Science has shown how important CRM is for enhancing a company's reputation, fostering a long-term favourable customer attitude, and increasing profitability (Fan *et al.* 2020; Vrontis, Christofi and Katsikeas 2020; Schamp *et al.* 2023). Additionally, companies have purposefully used CRM to promote brand positioning, differentiation, and trial (Thomas *et al.* 2020; Piao *et al.* 2024). Global corporate spending on

CRM has grown dramatically over the last 20 years, from \$816 million in 2002 to over \$2.05 billion in 2017 (Woodroof et al. 2019). With a 3.7% growth over 2015, the projected global investment in CRM was \$2 billion in 2016 (Strizhakova and Coulter 2019). CRM investments have increased by 6% annually on average over the last ten years, with \$2.24 billion invested in the United States alone in 2019 (Bhatti, Galan-Ladero and Galera-Casquet 2023; Schamp et al. 2023). This rate of growth is higher than the total amount spent on marketing, indicating that CRM is a popular tool for marketers.

Businesses all over the world have been investing much more in cause-related marketing in recent years because they understand how it can boost long-term profitability, build stronger relationships with customers, and improve brand equity (Vrontis et al., 2020). Big businesses are using CRM activities to stand out in competitive markets by incorporating social responsibility into their branding strategies. Global spending on CRM campaigns has increased, according to industry reports, as companies devote significant funds to socially conscious marketing initiatives (Silva et al., 2020). CRM has been thoroughly researched in developed economies, but its usefulness and use in developing nations like Ghana are still poorly understood (Wavei, 2023), leaving a significant knowledge gap that calls for more scholarly research.

Multinational firms are using CRM more and more as a tactic to increase customer loyalty and trust as they grow their operations in Africa and other emerging economies. CRM efforts have special prospects in developing nations, but localised research is necessary to assure efficacy because consumer views towards CRM and corporate social responsibility (CSR) differ greatly from those in the West. Without a thorough grasp of how CRM affects consumer behaviour in these areas, companies run the danger of running unsuccessful campaigns that don't build brand value or consumer trust. A large portion of the CRM literature now in publication assumes that customer reactions to CRM are universal; yet, consumers' perceptions of CSR programs are influenced by economic, social, and cultural aspects. The environment for CRM effectiveness in Ghana is unique due to financial limitations, corporate cynicism, and community-based philanthropic expectations. Ghanaian consumers are more likely to wonder whether CRM initiatives address local social needs or are just profit-driven branding exercises, in contrast to Western markets where consumers may reward brands for aligning with global social causes (such as sustainability, gender equality, and climate action).

Consumer scepticism, defined as the tendency to doubt the objectives underlying a brand's CRM initiatives, can dramatically decrease the influence of CRM on purchase behaviour. Sceptical customers may question whether a brand is truly dedicated to a cause, which makes them less receptive to CRM marketing (Lii and Lee 2012). Customers' scepticism of CRM is growing, especially in developing nations like Ghana where their knowledge and expectations of CSR are changing (Ghana Statistical Service 2022), it is crucial to understand how scepticism influences the effectiveness of CRM.

Even though CRM is a prominent study topic, most studies have focused on Western nations (Thomas et al. 2024; Bhatti, Galan-Ladero and Galera-Casquet 2023; Chaabouni, Jridi and Bakini 2021; Thomas, Kureshi and Vatawala 2020; Thomas and Kureshi 2020). The existing literature on CRM is mostly dedicated to industrialised economies, with less attention being paid to emerging countries like Ghana (Bhatti et al., 2022). Studies on the identification of customer incentives that have the potential to significantly impact CRM behaviour outcomes are scarce (Bergkvist and Zhou 2021; Vrontis et al., 2020). Additionally, despite its widespread use, scholarly researchers are just now starting to investigate how customers perceive and react to CRM offerings (Holiday et al. 2021; Vrontis Christofi and Katsikeas 2020). To better understand why individuals, do or do not respond favourably to promotions with a social component, it is vital to look into how consumers view CRM efforts.

Studies on the effectiveness of CRM have yielded conflicting findings. In some research, organisations' CRM campaigns have been found to elicit favourable behaviour from customers. (Akolaa et al. 2023; Sodero 2022). But according to some research, CRM initiatives have a detrimental effect on consumers' intentions to make repeat purchases (Suryavanshi et al. 2023; Bae 2018; Amawate and Deb 2021). Consumer scepticism, a phenomenon that has received little attention, is a good way to illustrate the adverse assessment of CRM initiatives (Chang and Kwak 2023; Holiday et al. 2021; Thomas and Kureshi 2020; Bae 2018). In developing nations like Ghana, CRM is still in its infancy. As a result, there is less confidence in the organization's real participation in CRM operations (Thomas and Jadeja, 2021), which leads to CRM scepticism (Thomas et al., 2023).

CRM research has mostly focused on how companies have developed and implemented various CRM programs (Chang and Kwak 2023; Holiday et al., 2021; Christofi et al., 2020a). Even though customers' scepticism regarding CRM is significant and important, there are not many

studies on its causes and effects (Deb et al., 2021; Rego and Hamilton 2022; Bae 2018). The current study sought to address a gap in the CRM literature by investigating scepticism as a mediator in the relationship between CRM and customer purchase behaviour. Moreover, mediating notions such as BE are mostly absent from the literature. Therefore, using BE as a mediator and customer scepticism as a moderator, this study evaluates the impact of CRM on how customers make purchases in the Ghanaian setting.

Academic research on consumer scepticism towards cause-related marketing (CRM) is still lacking, especially in developing nations like Ghana. Fewer studies have looked at the degree to which scepticism moderates this link, particularly in situations where trust in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities is brittle (Heinberg et al., 2021; Köykkä, 2024). Previous research has assessed the overall effectiveness of CRM in influencing consumer behaviour. There is a dearth of empirical research that systematically examines scepticism as a moderator in the CRM–purchase intention relationship, despite some studies (e.g., Lii and Lee, 2012; Mohr et al., 1998) acknowledging that scepticism can influence consumer responses to CSR and CRM initiatives. Previous research has mostly examined scepticism as a general customer attitude rather than examining how it affects the efficacy of CRM initiatives (Deb et al., 2021; Deb, 2021; Deb and Amawate, 2020). It is still unclear to what extent scepticism improves or degrades CRM results, especially in areas where consumer mistrust is high.

The majority of studies on CRM scepticism have been carried out in established countries, such as the United States and Europe (Deb et al., 2020), where customer perceptions of corporate social responsibility and transparency are different from those in emerging economies. In Ghana, scepticism is influenced by particular elements such as past corporate mismanagement, patchy CSR initiatives, and public mistrust of companies' social pledges. The majority of CRM literature hardly ever takes these contextual factors into account. It's unknown whether scepticism works similarly in Ghana as it does in Western contexts because there is not much research that sheds light on how Ghanaian consumers view and react to CRM initiatives.

Scepticism undermines the proposition made by many CRM research that cause-related efforts result in consistently good consumer responses. Customers may view CRM initiatives as profit-driven rather than charitable when scepticism is high, which would decrease their efficacy. To ascertain when and how CRM can be truly compelling, marketers must have a thorough

understanding of scepticism. Businesses run the risk of spending money on CRM programs that don't result in significant customer interaction if they don't address scepticism.

Although scepticism is acknowledged as a difficulty in CRM literature, its role as a moderating variable is not well discussed theoretically (Deb et al., 2021). Furthermore, the reasons why scepticism increases or decreases the effect of CRM on brand equity and purchase intention have not been adequately explored in prior research. Incorporating scepticism as a crucial component that influences customer responses in the CRM framework, this study seeks to close that gap. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by empirically testing scepticism as a moderator in the link between CRM, brand equity, and purchase intention and examining scepticism in the Ghanaian market while taking socioeconomic and cultural aspects that affect customer trust into account. In doing so, this study will advance a more sophisticated comprehension of CRM efficacy and offer practical suggestions for companies looking to use CRM tactics in Ghana and other emerging markets.

In developing nations like Ghana, consumers' mistrust of cause-related marketing (CRM) is growing as a result of several social, cultural, and economic factors. Scepticism in Ghana is influenced by underlying structural issues, past business behaviour, and changing consumer awareness, in contrast to scepticism in Western markets, which frequently results from excessive exposure to corporate social responsibility (CSR) marketing or worries about greenwashing. A large number of Ghanaian businesses have a track record of implementing sporadic, short-lived CSR projects that seem opportunistic rather than sincere. Customers are becoming increasingly sceptical of whether CRM programs are genuinely motivated by profit or are just a ploy after seeing firms utilise marketing campaigns to advance social causes yet break long-term promises. As an example, certain banking and telecommunications companies in Ghana started CSR initiatives centred on healthcare and education but abruptly stopped them without providing an explanation, raising questions about the genuineness of the companies.

Ghanaian customers are becoming more price-sensitive due to economic uncertainty and growing inflation, which makes them wonder if businesses care about social problems or if they are just using CRM as a marketing gimmick to support higher costs. Many Ghanaians place a higher value on affordability than corporate social responsibility, in contrast to consumers in affluent Western countries who might have more disposable means to support ethical firms (Eduful, 2019; Nordhagen and Demmler, 2023). For example, a consumer facing

financial strain may view a company’s claim of donating a percentage of profits to charity as a marketing gimmick rather than a true commitment to social change.

Mistrust of firms' promises of social responsibility is exacerbated by the perception of pervasive corporate and governmental corruption. Ghanaian customers frequently wonder if the money allotted for CRM projects truly reaches the right people or if it is being abused for company branding and tax savings. Also, Ghana's enforcement of CSR promises is laxer than in Western countries, where robust regulatory organisations and independent watchdogs keep businesses accountable. This makes it simpler for firms to take advantage of CRM for PR without producing noticeable results. Community structures, not corporate initiatives, are the foundation of social responsibility and generosity in Ghanaian society. Customers frequently anticipate that companies would give back to the community in ways that reflect regional cultural values and long-standing customs of charitable giving. CRM initiatives that don't involve community stakeholders or appear out of step with local values could be perceived as being unauthentic, alien, or out of step with local demands (Mainwaring, 2021; Hughes et al., 2025). For instance, a multinational company launching a CRM campaign without consulting local authorities or participating in community discussions may encounter resistance since the project can be perceived as being forced rather than developing naturally.

Due to more internet usage and social media exposure, Ghanaian customers are growing more knowledgeable about international business practices. They can compare the CSR initiatives of multinational firms in Western and African nations since they have access to data on how these companies function in various markets. Companies' motives are viewed with suspicion if they are thought to be investing less in African markets. For example, a company that donates large sums to social causes in Europe but offers only symbolic CRM efforts in Ghana might be called out on social media for corporate double standards.

**Table 1.1 How Scepticism in Ghana Differs from Western Markets**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Scepticism in Ghana</b>	<b>Scepticism in Western Markets</b>
<b>Corporate Transparency</b>	Rooted in concerns about corruption and weak accountability.	Rooted in fears of greenwashing and deceptive advertising.

<b>Economic Priorities</b>	Consumers prioritize affordability over ethical branding.	Consumers may be willing to pay more for ethical brands.
<b>CSR Expectations</b>	Preference for long-term, community-driven impact.	Focus on measurable sustainability and social justice efforts.
<b>Trust in Institutions</b>	Scepticism is heightened by weak regulatory oversight.	Consumers may trust independent watchdogs to hold brands accountable.
<b>Exposure to Global CSR Trends</b>	Awareness of disparities in CSR investments between Africa and the West.	More focus on whether brands meet environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards.

Brands can improve their reputation, lessen scepticism, and boost the efficacy of their CRM campaigns in Ghana by addressing these issues. Research in developed markets indicates that CRM's influence on customer purchasing behaviour is strengthened by brand equity; however, little is known about how this relationship plays out in African markets, where brand trust is frequently brittle (Amoako et al., 2021).

Similarly, although cynicism has been recognised as a hindrance to CRM efficacy, its moderating function in emerging markets, where past business wrongdoing, lax regulatory oversight, and economic hardship intensify consumer scepticism, has not been sufficiently explored in previous research (Deb et al., 2021). Academics and business professionals must comprehend how BE mediates and how scepticism limits CRM's impact in Ghana. Academic research must advance to offer evidence-based insights that guide successful and culturally appropriate CRM strategies as more businesses increase their CRM investments in Africa. Probing how CRM, brand equity, and scepticism interact, this study will further CRM theory and offer practical suggestions for companies wishing to use socially conscious marketing techniques in Ghana and other developing nations.

The need to comprehend how CRM works in non-western economies is highlighted by the growing global investment in CRM. Businesses run the risk of wasting money on CRM initiatives that don't connect with consumers in emerging economies if they don't conduct region-specific research. By investigating how CRM affects customer buying behaviour in Ghana, with brand equity acting as a mediator and cynicism acting as a moderator, this study

seeks to close this gap and offer both theoretical insights and real-world applications for businesses doing business in developing nations.

In the paradigm of cause-related marketing (CRM), scepticism moderates the degree of CRM's influence, whereas brand equity (BE) mediates the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour. These two factors don't work alone; rather, they collaborate to greatly influence how successful CRM campaigns are, especially in developing nations like Ghana.

The value that customers attach to a brand based on awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty is known as brand equity (BE) (Aaker, 1991). In the context of CRM, a business can improve its brand equity through cause-related marketing by building favourable brand associations and raising perceived brand credibility. This, in turn, increases consumer trust and emotional attachment to the brand, which in turn influences purchase intention (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). Instead of immediately increasing consumer purchases, CRM boosts BE, which in turn increases consumer purchasing behaviour (Fiiwe et al., 2023). For instance, a telecom business in Ghana that contributes a portion of its earnings to educational initiatives might build brand equity by projecting an image of social responsibility. Even if consumers were originally uninterested in the CRM effort, they are more inclined to prefer BE over rival brands as it expands.

Customers' propensity to question the authenticity of a company's CSR initiatives is known as scepticism (Lii and Lee, 2012). At high levels of scepticism, customers may doubt the real intentions of CRM initiatives, believing that they are motivated more by financial gain than by sincere social concern. Scepticism diminishes CRM's impact on BE, preventing consumers from developing strong positive associations with the brand (Deb et al., 2021). As a result, strong suspicion can lessen BE's mediating effect, which in turn lessens CRM's influence on consumer behaviour, even when a business uses CRM. For example, a Ghanaian customer's scepticism prevents the development of positive brand equity if they think a bank's CRM initiative (such as tree-planting initiatives) is just a publicity gimmick. This means that the campaign is unlikely to influence their purchasing decisions.

CRM enhances brand equity and strengthens purchase intent when customers believe in a company's social endeavours (Alam et al., 2021). This indicates that BE has a strong mediating influence since CRM effectively raises brand loyalty and image. For instance, BE mediation will be stronger for a well-known beverage company in Ghana with a track record of regular

social responsibility initiatives since customers will find its CRM reliable. The CRM–BE relationship is weakened by high scepticism, which makes it more difficult for CRM initiatives to improve brand perceptions (Deb et al., 2021). CRM may even create unfavourable brand connections if scepticism is excessive, which would result in brand distrust rather than equity (SÖZER, 2019). For instance, a fast-food business that runs a CRM campaign promoting health measures while also facing criticism for its unhealthy cuisine may be rejected outright by suspicious customers, negating any possible benefits in brand equity.

Scepticism can reduce BE's impact on purchase intention, even when CRM effectively increases BE (Deb et al., 2021). This implies that even customers who recognise a strong brand equity may be hesitant to buy if they continue to have doubts about the company's intentions. For example, even when a customer values a fashion brand's sustainable apparel program (strong BE), they may still decide not to buy from them if they believe the brand is engaging in greenwashing. Businesses operating in Ghana must comprehend this dynamic since there is growing suspicion about CSR initiatives, and implementing CRM methods mindlessly without addressing this scepticism could fail (Data, 2014). To guarantee that CRM builds brand equity and eventually encourages customer purchases, businesses must proactively endeavour to lower mistrust (for example, by openness, sustained CSR commitments, and community involvement). Examining this interaction empirically in a developing market advances CRM theory and offers insights that assist companies in Ghana and elsewhere in creating more successful CRM strategies (Opoku et al., 2025).

Consumer scepticism moderates this process by either strengthening or weakening the strength of these relationships, but cause-related marketing (CRM) indirectly influences consumer purchasing behaviour by boosting brand equity (BE), which in turn strengthens positive consumer attitudes and increases purchase intentions (Conde, 2024). The main mechanisms through which BE functions as a mediator and scepticism as a moderator are:

Brand awareness mechanism- Linking the brand to social problems through CRM efforts raises brand awareness among consumers. Enhanced awareness improves brand recall and acquaintance, resulting in a higher possibility of consumer engagement and purchase (Opoku et al., 2025). For instance, when a telecom provider in Ghana collaborates with a rural education program, it becomes more visible, which raises customer preference and awareness.

Perceived Brand Credibility and Trust Mechanism- CRM programs can convey corporate authenticity, enhancing the brand's perceived legitimacy and dependability (Safeer and Liu, 2023). Stronger emotional ties to the brand result from increased trust, which increases consumer support for it. For example, if a financial institution consistently supports women's entrepreneurship programs, consumers may perceive it as socially responsible and ethical, increasing trust and engagement.

Positive Brand Associations Mechanism- CRM initiatives reinforce a positive brand image by establishing connections between the brand and socially desirable values. Strong brand associations can lead to higher emotional attachment, making consumers more likely to favour and advocate for the brand (Japutra et al., 2018). For instance, by associating with clean water projects, a beverage brand in Ghana may create favourable connections that appeal to the local population and raise its perceived level of social responsibility.

Brand Loyalty and Purchase Intention Mechanism- When CRM enhances BE, customers become more devoted to the brand and make more frequent purchases (Alam et al., 2021). Selecting a brand that shares their values increases the likelihood that consumers will stick with it over time. An example might be a clothing company that regularly contributes to children's education, which could draw in socially conscious customers who would otherwise choose to buy from rivals. In effect, CRM improves associates, loyalty, credibility, and brand recognition, all of which increase purchasing behaviour.

Scepticism is a moderator that either neutralises or weakens the mediation effect of BE. It affects CRM's impact at three crucial points: Moderating the CRM → BE Link - High scepticism weakens the formation of brand equity by reducing consumers' belief in the sincerity of CRM campaigns; If scepticism is high, CRM efforts may be perceived as opportunistic or profit-driven, which will prevent BE from developing. For instance, a cosmetics company that is promoting an anti-child labour campaign while facing accusations of unethical labour practices may encounter consumer scepticism, rendering CRM ineffective in bolstering BE (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020).

Moderating the BE → Consumer Behaviour Link-Scepticism can lessen the influence of BE on purchasing behaviour, even in cases where CRM successfully improves BE. Even though a company has strong brand equity, consumers who have doubts about its intentions may, nevertheless, choose not to buy (SÖZER, 2019). For instance, a Ghanaian bank that supports

youth employment initiatives may have a high BE, but customers may decide not to create accounts if they believe there are hidden fees or unethical banking practices. Directly Influencing CRM Perceptions- Scepticism can result in reactance, where customers actively reject CRM initiatives in markets where corporate mistrust is prevalent (Teah et al., 2023). For instance, scepticism might make CRM initiatives a reputational liability rather than an asset if an oil business starts a campaign on environmental sustainability but has a history of pollution.

Brand equity mediates CRM's impact on consumer behaviour by enhancing awareness, trust, positive associations, and loyalty. Consumer scepticism moderates this process by weakening or neutralising the CRM → BE → Purchase Behaviour link. In high-septicism environments like Ghana, businesses must actively combat scepticism to ensure that CRM strategies successfully translate into increased consumer engagement and sales.

In developing markets like Ghana, where consumer decision-making is frequently impacted by elements like perceived quality, corporate reputation, and brand credibility, brand equity (BE) is especially important in forming consumer trust and loyalty (Opoku et al., 2025). By creating favourable brand associations, BE increases trust, which in turn promotes enduring customer loyalty. The main ways that BE builds loyalty and trust in the Ghanaian market are discussed below.

**Brand Credibility and Reliability-** Concerns about corporate accountability, product authenticity, and business ethics often result in low trust in emerging markets. Strong brand equity indicates that a company is trustworthy, dependable, and consistent, which lowers uncertainty and boosts consumer confidence in the brand. For instance, a well-known Ghanaian bank with a track record of ethical business practices and financial stability will be seen as more trustworthy and will be preferred by customers over less respectable rivals.

**Perceived Quality and Consistency-** Similar to consumers in many emerging economies, Ghanaian consumers place a high importance on consistent service and dependable products when selecting brands. Because a high-equity brand is linked to great quality, customers are more likely to have faith that it will live up to their expectations (Tran and Nguyen, 2022). As an illustration, a nearby food processing business that continuously produces hygienic, high-quality goods would win over customers' trust even if rivals provide cheaper costs.

Positive Brand Associations and Reputation: When favourable brand associations with moral business conduct are encouraged, corporate social responsibility, and superior performance, BE increases consumer trust. Consumer trust is gained more quickly by companies recognised for their social impact and cause-related marketing (CRM) efforts than by those thought to be only focused on making money (Tran and Nguyen, 2022). For instance, a Ghanaian telecom provider that regularly funds rural education initiatives will build a solid reputation and increase customer loyalty. Strong emotional ties between consumers and high BE brands increase brand preference and attachment levels. Brands that interact with local communities tend to experience higher levels of loyalty in Ghana, where consumers place a high emphasis on interpersonal relationships and community involvement (Palazzo et al., 2020). For example, a beverage firm can foster a feeling of community and brand loyalty by regularly supporting regional celebrations and cultural events. Since they are risk-averse and have little extra money, consumers in emerging regions might stick with well-known brands. High BE brands give customers a sense of dependability, excellent experiences, and perceived security, which makes switching difficult (Safeer and Liu, 2023). For instance, even if a competitor provides reduced transaction costs, a Ghanaian customer who has regularly used a specific brand of mobile money service (such as MTN MoMo) may be reluctant to transfer because of familiarity and trust. Social influence and word-of-mouth advertising are important factors in determining customer choices in Ghana. Positive recommendations and natural referrals are enjoyed by high BE brands, which strengthens customer loyalty (Alam et al., 2021). For instance, a cosmetics company that uses natural, regional components might profit from strong peer recommendations, which would guarantee recurring business.

Price sensitivity may cause consumers to prioritise affordability over brand loyalty, even for high-equity brands; counterfeit and informal markets: the presence of counterfeit products may erode brand trust, forcing companies to actively protect their brand reputation; and consumer scepticism: some consumers may doubt corporate intentions, especially when past unethical business practices exist (Mmboga, 2023). These market-specific challenges can affect BE's effectiveness despite its positive effects. To maximize trust and loyalty, businesses in Ghana should invest in transparency and authenticity. Share information about product sources, social efforts, and quality assurances to minimise scepticism and increase confidence and loyalty (Deb et al., 2021). Strengthen local engagement by encouraging neighborhood-based initiatives to create favourable emotional connections with the brand. Preserve consistent quality to strengthen customer confidence, guarantee product dependability and superior customer

service (Teah 2023). Leverage word-of-mouth and influencer marketing to increase favourable brand perceptions, use social networks and dependable individuals. Credibility, quality perception, emotional attachment, and brand familiarity are all reinforced by brand equity, which greatly increases consumer trust and loyalty (Opoku et al., 2025). In Ghana, however, businesses must be proactive in preserving and enhancing their brand equity to maintain long-term customer loyalty due to factors like scepticism, financial limitations, and informal market competition.

The Role of Scepticism as a Moderator in Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) and Its Impact on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour was also considered significant in this doctoral thesis. The relationship between cause-related marketing (CRM) and purchasing behaviour is moderated by consumer scepticism, which can either increase or decrease CRM's efficacy (Sakinah and Gayatri, 2024). Whether customers view CRM initiatives as sincere and effective or as manipulative and self-serving depends on the level of scepticism. The ways that scepticism affects CRM's impact, both positively and negatively, are broken down below.

High levels of scepticism might cause consumers to mistrust business intentions, which diminishes CRM's capacity to boost brand equity (BE) and impact purchasing decisions through the following mechanisms:

**Questioning the Authenticity of CRM Campaigns-** High-scepticism consumers are more likely to think that businesses use CRM for financial gain than for true social responsibility, which diminishes the efforts' emotional appeal and legitimacy. For instance, when a telecom company in Ghana launches a digital literacy campaign in rural areas, it can be viewed as a way to grow its client base rather than having a significant impact, which would make sceptics reject the idea.

**Reduced Trust in Brand Equity (BE) as a Mediator-** Sceptical Customers do not connect the brand with significant change, which reduces CRM's capacity to positively impact brand equity (BE). Consequently, purchase intention, perceived credibility, and brand trust are all reduced (Conde, 2024). For instance, a fast-food company that supports health campaigns but is accused of selling unhealthy goods may not be able to increase its brand equity because sceptics will perceive a conflict in its customer relationship management initiatives.

Negative Word-of-Mouth and Brand Backlash- Highly sceptical People may actively oppose or critique CRM campaigns, a phenomenon known as consumer reactance. Rather than increasing brand loyalty, CRM initiatives could lead to boycotts and bad press. For instance, if a multinational oil corporation financing environmental sustainability projects in Ghana has a track record of environmental destruction, it may face criticism, and customers may actively steer clear of its products.

Increased Price Sensitivity over Social Cause Commitment- Sceptical customers may put affordability ahead of brand purpose in developing markets like Ghana, where economic considerations have a significant impact on purchasing decisions (Obemg, 2022). If customers think CRM is merely a marketing ploy, they might choose less expensive options even if they recognise a brand's social contributions. For example, a customer may decide to purchase a brand of detergent that is inexpensive and not CRM rather than a slightly more costly brand that contributes to clean water projects, unsure if the donation truly helps the neighbourhood. In effect, a high level of scepticism damages CRM's efficacy by eroding consumer trust, decreasing brand reputation, and raising campaign resistance (Tadimarri et al., 2024).

In certain instances, scepticism might increase the impact of CRM by motivating companies to use more open, genuine, and socially conscious marketing techniques (Deb et al., 2021). Sceptical customers pressure businesses to show them how their CRM initiatives are effective. Brands gain more credibility and trust when they respond to scepticism with impact reports, open communication, and third-party verification (Carson et al., 2023). For instance, a beverage firm in Ghana that contributes a portion of its sales to clean water initiatives while simultaneously offering yearly impact reports and independent audits may gain the confidence of sceptics and encourage brand support.

Sceptical customers become more involved and brand loyal when they observe measurable outcomes from CRM campaigns. Sceptics might be turned into brand champions by a company that continuously demonstrates its dedication to a cause (Holiday et al., 2021). As an example, a fashion firm that provides school uniforms to Ghanaian children from disadvantaged backgrounds and frequently posts success stories and beneficiary testimonials may win over customers' trust and convert scepticism into support.

Businesses are compelled by high scepticism to make sure that their CRM initiatives complement their main company operations rather than being seen as an irrelevant add-on.

When CRM is ingrained in a business's operations and mission, it appears genuine to sceptics (Mattila et al., 2021). As an example, a Ghanaian renewable energy firm that supports clean energy education initiatives is more likely to win people over than a fossil fuel company that donates to environmental causes since the former has a greater cause-brand alignment.

Sceptical customers want more uniqueness and genuineness in marketplaces where many brands use CRM. Companies that effectively handle scepticism differentiate themselves from rivals, increasing customer preference and loyalty (Conde 2024). For instance, if several banks in Ghana say they fund financial literacy initiatives, the one that actively participates in the community, collaborates with non-governmental organisations, and displays quantifiable advancements will be more trusted and retain customers. Consequently, when brands react well, scepticism increases the impact of CRM by promoting transparency, enhancing brand authenticity, and setting brands apart from rivals (Deb et al., 2024).

Customers trust CRM efforts, which leads to increased brand equity and higher purchase intentions in the low scepticism scenario (CRM → High Brand Equity → Increased Purchases). Example: A Ghanaian dairy company receives a lot of support from customers and repeat business when it donates to child nutrition programs and reports on its impact regularly. Customers doubt the integrity of the CRM, which results in weak or no brand equity increases and little to no influence on purchasing behaviour (Lee and Charles, 2021). Example: Because consumers perceive the CRM initiative as inconsistent, a tobacco firm that funds anti-smoking initiatives may not be able to gain their trust. The role of Scepticism as a Beneficial Moderator (CRM → Increased Authenticity → Stronger Brand Equity → Higher Purchases) was hence considered paramount. Scepticism encourages brands to enhance CRM tactics, increase transparency and impact reporting, and increase trust and brand equity, leading to higher purchases (Sakinah and Gayatri, 2024). For instance, a bottled water company may increase sales and win over sceptics if it uses recyclable materials, makes donations to clean water projects, and makes environmental effect statistics publicly available.

To guarantee CRM success in a market with a high degree of scepticism, businesses need to be open and demonstrate impact by publishing impact reports, testimonies, and independent audits (Deb et al., 2021) by making sure the cause aligns with the company's primary objective by aligning CRM with fundamental business principles and again, involving customers, communities, and non-governmental organisations in CRM activities. Scepticism either reduces (if trust is low) or increases (if businesses actively address concerns) CRM's influence

on consumer purchase behaviour (Priporas et al., 2020). Businesses must demonstrate the sincerity of their CRM initiatives in developing nations like Ghana, where corporate transparency is a developing concern, to win over sceptics and devoted customers.

The distinct economic, cultural, and market-specific characteristics of Ghana make it difficult to study cause-related marketing (Opoku et al., 2025). These challenges impact data collection, analysis, and the generalisability of findings. Data limitations, cultural differences in brand perception, measuring scepticism, and business transparency are some of the particular methodological challenges that come with studying CRM in Ghana. By adjusting measurement tools, varying sampling strategies, employing longitudinal designs, and incorporating qualitative insights, researchers can overcome these challenges and ensure comprehensive, dependable, and significant research that accurately captures the dynamics of CRM in Ghana. In a market like Ghana, where consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity are influenced by cultural values, economic realities, historical corporate behaviour, and trust in firms, consumer scepticism towards cause-related marketing (CRM) can be complicated (Kumar et al., 2020). The measurement of scepticism and the difficulties in assessing CRM's influence in this regard are discussed below.

In CRM, scepticism is the extent to which customers doubt the authenticity and intentions of a business's socially conscious endeavours. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques, tailored to Ghana's particular market features, can be used to evaluate it. There are several validated scepticism scales that measure consumer doubt about corporate motives, such as Lii and Lee (2012) and Forehand and Grier (2003). However, these need to be adjusted to account for Ghana-specific factors, such as perceived corporate transparency, trust in business ethics, impact perception and past corporate behaviour. A Likert scale survey (e.g., 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) can capture degrees of scepticism across consumer groups. Qualitative approaches offer deeper insights since scepticism can be emotionally motivated and connected to individual experiences:

- Focus groups and customer interviews: Learn how consumers feel about CRM marketing and whether their scepticism is influenced by prior experiences.
- Social Media Sentiment Analysis: Examining customer responses on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter can highlight scepticism by identifying critical or unfavourable remarks about CRM initiatives.

- Observational Studies: Researching how customers interact with CRM campaigns (such as their propensity to buy CRM-related goods) might reveal levels of trust.

A localised strategy that takes into account cultural factors, qualitative insights, and the scepticism scales currently in use is needed to measure scepticism in Ghana (Opoku Mensah et al., 2023). In the meantime, assessing the effectiveness of CRM poses difficulties, including separating the impact of CRM, considering scepticism levels, and acquiring trustworthy business data. CRM research in Ghana will become more accurate and offer useful information to companies by resolving these methodological issues.

#### **1.4 Research Aims and Objectives**

This study uses consumer scepticism as a moderator and BE as a mediator to assess how CRM affects customer purchase behaviour.

The objectives of this research were:

- To explore consumers' understanding and attitude towards cause-related marketing in Ghana.
- To determine the influence of cause-related marketing on consumer purchase behaviours.
- To determine the mediating role of brand equity in the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour.
- To determine the moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between cause-related marketing and brand equity.
- To identify the moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between brand equity and consumer purchasing behaviour.
- To establish the moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour.
- To develop a conceptual framework for studying Cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour in the context of Ghana.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. What is the level of Ghanaian consumers' understanding and attitudes towards cause-related marketing?
2. What is the influence of cause-related marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour in the Ghanaian contexts?

3. What is the mediating role of brand equity on the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour in Ghana?
4. What The moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between cause-related marketing and brand equity?
5. What is the moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between brand equity and consumer purchasing behaviour?
6. What is the moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour?
7. What is the conceptual framework for the study of cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour in the context of Ghana?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The findings will have significant ramifications for academics, marketers, nonprofit organisations, and legislators. Studying the factors that affect consumer behaviour, as well as the part BE and consumer cynicism play in understanding the effects of CRM, will be beneficial to academics. Scholars will benefit from knowing how the factors under investigation interact directly, mediatedly, and moderately. Therefore, the results of this study could offer helpful suggestions for further organised CRM research in Ghana. It is envisaged that businesses and policymakers will gain insight into the elements that can reduce scepticism and improve BE, enabling them to create more appropriate CRM activities. This study is the first of its type in Ghana.

The research findings are likely to supplement and improve existing knowledge of CRM, its effectiveness, and consumer purchasing behaviour, with BE serving as a mediator and customer scepticism as a moderator. The findings of this study are intended to alert companies to the possible disadvantages of CRM and encourage them to give careful thought to the designs of their campaigns.

Additionally, company managers and marketers may create CRM strategies and communications that encourage positive customer responses by knowing how scepticism about certain CRM activities develops. Understanding the negative effects of CRM-related scepticism might also motivate businesses to emphasise candour, openness, and transparency in their CRM procedures. They will be better equipped to adopt sustainable practices that will protect the environment and advance society as a whole. Furthermore, public leaders who comprehend CRM scepticism will be able to create CRM regulations that shield customers

from deceptive CRM messages and promote and support ethical behaviour by businesses and customers.

The Contribution of the Study to Existing Theory and Research is seen as paramount. This study makes numerous significant contributions to the body of research on Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) and Consumer Purchasing Behaviour in Ghana, using Brand Equity (BE) as a Mediator and Consumer Scepticism as a Moderator. It challenges and expands upon existing theories by offering fresh perspectives on CRM's efficacy in a developing market. Here is a thorough analysis of its empirical and theoretical contributions. The study advances brand equity theory in an emerging market context by building on Aaker's (1991) Brand Equity Theory. According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations all contribute to brand equity (BE), which in turn affects consumer choices. Nonetheless, the majority of research has examined this framework in Western economies, where there is a comparatively high level of brand trust.

In Ghana, where brand trust is impacted by several social, economic, and cultural aspects, this study examines the mediating effect of BE between CRM and customer purchasing behaviour. It adds to Aaker's theory by validating it in a non-Western context by investigating if CRM actions improve BE in Ghana and whether this results in stronger brand loyalty and increased purchase intention. Unlike previous studies that assume BE always enhances CRM effectiveness, this research examines whether high consumer scepticism weakens BE's mediating role, challenging the assumption that BE always leads to positive brand outcomes. The Key Theoretical Question: Does CRM improve brand equity in Ghana in the same way as in developed markets, or does consumer scepticism disrupt this process?

This study extends the understanding of consumer scepticism in CRM, challenging Lii and Lee, (2012) findings on consumer scepticism. Scepticism, according to Lii and Lee (2012), lowers customer response to CRM since it causes people to question the real intentions of businesses. Their work mostly focuses on Western and Asian markets, where greenwashing and business scandals are frequently associated with scepticism. This study places scepticism in Ghana in a setting where scepticism is shaped differently by cultural attitudes towards philanthropy, economic concerns, and mistrust of corporations. It investigates whether a high level of scepticism eliminates the benefits of CRM or whether, in some circumstances, specific CRM tactics (such as long-term commitments and local relationships) can lessen scepticism

and increase efficacy in Ghana, in contrast to Lii and Lee's broad definition of scepticism. The key Theoretical Question: Can some CRM tactics lessen the detrimental effects of consumer scepticism, and does scepticism operate differently in Ghana than in developed markets?

This doctoral thesis elaborates on Hoeffler and Keller's (2002) CRM Effectiveness Model. Hoeffler and Keller (2002) propose that CRM increases brand credibility and emotional connection with customers, which in turn leads to increased purchase behaviour. However, their model is predicated on the idea that CRM initiatives are generally well-received, ignoring the moderating influence of consumer scepticism or the distinct effects in emerging markets. This study updates their model by adding customer scepticism as a moderator, investigating whether scepticism improves or degrades the link between CRM, BE, and purchase intention. It also challenges the notion that all CRM initiatives have the same effect by examining whether various campaign types (such as one-time gifts vs ongoing social commitments) have distinct effects on Ghanaian consumers' purchasing decisions. In order to provide CRM literature more context, it examines whether Ghanaian consumers give preference to locally relevant reasons (such as infrastructure, health, and education) over general worldwide causes. The main theoretical question is whether scepticism substantially changes the link between brand trust and consumer behaviour in Ghana or if CRM automatically improves these aspects.

The dynamics of CRM differ greatly in Ghana and other emerging markets because of financial limitations, regulatory obstacles, and ingrained scepticism towards businesses. The majority of CRM research to date has concentrated on developed economies where businesses have built trust, stable regulatory environments, and higher disposable income among consumers. The study challenges Western-centric CRM models by showing that context is important and that strategies that are effective in developed economies might not be in emerging ones. Ghanaian companies may use the evidence-based suggestions it offers to create more successful CRM initiatives that boost brand equity and lower scepticism. It draws attention to how government regulations and business openness might improve CRM's efficacy, which may have an impact on Ghanaian public policy around corporate social responsibility. The Key Theoretical Question is: what CRM tactics are most effective in Ghana, and how can companies and policymakers modify CRM initiatives to increase customer trust?

The study improves existing theories by examining the Theory of Brand Equity in a New Market (Aaker, 1991). Adapting theories of consumer scepticism to Ghana's distinct cultural

and economic circumstances (Lii and Lee, 2012) and adding scepticism as a crucial moderator to CRM effectiveness models (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002). It also challenges existing theories by casting doubt on the notion that CRM always improves brand equity—if scepticism is excessive, CRM might not be effective. Contesting the notion that all CRM initiatives have the same outcome—due to cultural and economic variations, some campaigns may be successful while others fail. Pointing out how CRM functions differently in developing nations and reorienting the emphasis from research that is dominated by the West to discoveries that are relevant to the local setting. In addition to expanding academic understanding, this study offers useful tactics for companies looking to maximise their CRM campaigns by connecting current CRM theories with the realities of the Ghanaian market.

This doctoral thesis findings will refine or challenge existing models of Consumer Behaviour, CRM Effectiveness, and Brand Management Theories. The research on Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) and Consumer Purchasing Behaviour in Ghana, with Consumer Scepticism as a Moderator and Brand Equity (BE) as a Mediator, will offer empirical insights that improve, expand, or contradict current theories of consumer behaviour, CRM efficacy, and brand management. The findings' potential contributions will improve models of consumer behaviour by examining CRM's impact on purchase choices. According to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms influence consumers' intentions to make purchases. Many studies in the CRM context assume that favourable perceptions of socially conscious brands inevitably result in higher purchase intentions. The study shows that scepticism can overcome favourable sentiments towards cause-related brands, challenging the notion that CRM always improves favourable consumer perceptions. If research shows that scepticism lessens the influence of CRM on purchase intention, this would imply that attitudes by themselves are not enough to influence behaviour; credibility and trust must also be taken into account. By adding consumer scepticism as a moderating component, it will expand on TPB and improve our comprehension of intention formation in emerging markets. An important theoretical enhancement is that unless consumer scepticism is handled, CRM might not always convert into purchasing behaviour, necessitating adjustments to current theories of consumer behaviour.

Hoeffler and Keller (2002) argue in their model that CRM improves brand credibility, emotional connection, and purchasing behaviour, assuming that all CRM efforts have a positive impact when done correctly. Scepticism may have a substantial impact on CRM effectiveness

in Ghana, calling into question the universality of Western methods. The study will compare the effectiveness of different CRM initiatives (e.g., long-term commitments vs. one-time gifts) in reducing scepticism, offering a more comprehensive knowledge of CRM methods. A "Contingency-Based CRM Effectiveness Model" might be developed to consider cultural and economic settings when determining CRM success, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. The key theoretical challenge is that CRM is not intrinsically effective; its performance depends on customer scepticism levels, cultural faith in firms, and campaign execution in individual regions.

Brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty all work together to create brand equity (BE), which in turn influences consumer trust and purchase decisions positively, according to Aaker's model. This study refines Aaker's brand equity model in this manner. If CRM fails to boost brand equity owing to strong scepticism, it suggests that brand equity is not always a stable mediator, its influence may depend on external factors like trust, credibility, and previous business behaviour. The study identifies scepticism as a possible disruptor to brand equity building, indicating that consumers in emerging economies may not immediately equate CRM with higher brand value. The findings support a dual-pathway model in which high scepticism undermines the CRM-BE link, diminishing its impact on purchase behaviour. Low scepticism increases the CRM-BE interaction, increasing trust and consumer loyalty. The Key Theoretical Refinement is that brand equity's involvement in CRM effectiveness may not be direct, it is dependent on customers' scepticism of corporate objectives.

This study improves upon Consumer Behaviour Models (TPB) by incorporating scepticism as a crucial obstacle to the establishment of intentions. Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1991) by adding scepticism as a component that can either increase or decrease BE's mediating effect, and the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) by demonstrating that scepticism may be controlled by openness and credibility-building, rather than always resulting in outright rejection. This study challenges CRM Effectiveness Models (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002) by showing that CRM's effectiveness varies depending on levels of scepticism and trust. The Presumption that Brand Equity Always Improves CRM Outcomes—this effect may be diminished or even eliminated by scepticism. This study suggests a conditional association that is influenced by scepticism levels rather than a one-way relationship between CRM and purchase behaviour.

This study will improve our understanding of CRM's efficacy, especially in emerging areas where consumer scepticism and distrust are significantly more prevalent than in established ones. Businesses will be able to customise CRM campaigns for more impact, to its new CRM architecture, which considers context-specific scepticism. It will put traditional brand equity methods to the test, highlighting the necessity of trust-building tactics in addition to CRM initiatives. The way academics and professionals approach CRM, brand management, and consumer behaviour in emerging economies will change as a result of this research's integration of these findings.

How Brand Equity (BE) Mediates the Relationship Between Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) and Consumer Behaviour in Emerging Markets like Ghana forms part of the study's concern. One important way that Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) affects consumer behaviour is through Brand Equity (BE). BE's mediating function is especially important in developing nations like Ghana, where public trust in businesses is frequently weaker than in wealthy ones. CRM programs seek to change consumer behaviour by linking a brand to kindness and social responsibility. This effect is rarely straightforward, though, as customers don't often buy things right away simply because a firm uses CRM. Rather, BE serves as a conduit that converts CRM initiatives into more loyalty, trust, and eventually, buying patterns. CRM makes the business stand out from the competition, which raises brand awareness. It improves brand connections by associating the brand with consumer-relevant social causes. It raises perceived quality because customers might link socially conscious companies to better moral and product standards. And customers feel an emotional connection to companies that promote worthwhile causes, which increases brand loyalty.

Customers are more inclined to trust and favour a brand when BE is high, which lowers the perceived risk of making a purchase. Long-term brand loyalty and recurring business are fuelled by brand loyalty. Customers become more emotionally invested in the brand, increasing the likelihood that they will recommend it and spread goodwill. BE is the main factor influencing purchase intention, making sure that CRM's benefits last over time. CRM might not have a big influence on customer behaviour without good BE since people might continue to doubt business intentions. The Key Insight is that CRM influences consumers' opinions of a brand's legitimacy and authenticity through BE rather than directly influencing their purchasing decisions in emerging countries.

In contrast to industrialised economies, where corporate openness and institutional trust are often high, emerging markets like Ghana have particular difficulties that make BE's mediation role even more crucial. A large number of Ghanaian customers question the sincerity of CSR and CRM initiatives, viewing them as commercial ploys rather than sincere dedications to social problems. This scepticism is countered by strong BE.

In Ghana, community perceptions and word-of-mouth are important factors in brand assessment. Customer recommendations and trust are more likely for a brand with a high BE (developed through CRM). Although customers may be in favour of social issues, economic realities frequently limit their purchasing power. Customers are more at ease selecting CRM-participating brands over less expensive ones when there is a strong BE since it lowers the perceived financial risk. Ghanaian consumers are more receptive to businesses that promote regional causes, such as youth employment, healthcare, or education. CRM initiatives that create pertinent brand relationships support BE more successfully. CRM's capacity to affect consumer behaviour in Ghana is contingent upon its ability to fortify BE. Due to financial constraints and scepticism, CRM may not be able to influence purchase behaviour if BE is weak.

Existing studies support the mediating role of BE in CRM effectiveness, especially in emerging markets. Strong brand equity boosts consumer trust and emotional connection, increasing the likelihood that consumers will support socially conscious firms, according to Keller (1993). Perera et al., (2023) discovered that because consumers in emerging economies have less institutional trust and rely more on brand reputation, brand equity has a stronger mediating effect there than in developed economies.

According to Pandey et al., (2024), CRM works best when it enhances perceived brand authenticity, which is a crucial element of BE in emerging markets. Building on previous research, this study contributes to theory by demonstrating how BE influences CRM effectiveness in Ghana, where trust dynamics and economic considerations influence consumer responses differently than in Western markets.

In Ghana, where there is a low level of confidence in organisations, Brand Equity (BE) is the primary factor that determines whether CRM initiatives are successful or not. CRM does not directly influence customer purchasing behaviour. CRM is translated into purchasing behaviour by all four BE components—awareness, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty.

In the absence of strong BE, consumer scepticism may reduce or even eliminate CRM's influence. As a result, this study challenges current CRM models that presume a direct impact on customer behaviour without taking market-specific trust dynamics into account, offering a more nuanced understanding of how CRM affects consumer behaviour in emerging economies by highlighting the crucial function of BE as a mediator.

One important moderating factor that affects the efficacy of CRM campaigns is consumer scepticism, or the propensity to question the sincerity or intentions of CSR projects. Due to historical mistrust of companies, worries about "CSR-washing," and economic pressures that influence consumer decisions, scepticism is increased in rising markets like Ghana. Customers may wonder if a brand's CRM initiatives are genuinely charitable or just a marketing gimmick when scepticism is high. This lessens CRM's influence on consumer buying patterns and brand equity (BE), which makes it a major obstacle for companies looking to employ social concerns as a strategy for brand differentiation. CRM programs may not succeed or even backfire if scepticism is not adequately controlled, which would result in worse customer views rather than greater loyalty or purchase intention.

Understanding and addressing consumer scepticism is essential for unlocking the full potential of CRM, ensuring that social initiatives not only have a positive impact but also enhance brand trust, loyalty, and consumer engagement. Consumer scepticism plays a powerful moderating role in CRM effectiveness, especially in emerging markets like Ghana where trust in corporations is often lower. Businesses must focus on transparency, long-term engagement, and credible partnerships to reduce scepticism and strengthen CRM's impact. Future research should explore digital trust mechanisms, cultural variations in scepticism, and strategies to build corporate credibility in socially responsible marketing.

With its deeper insights into consumer attitudes towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) in emerging markets and the emotional mechanisms behind the efficacy of cause-related marketing (CRM), this study adds to the body of knowledge in academia. By elucidating how brand equity (BE) mediates CRM's impacts and how scepticism moderates them, the findings will improve current theories and pave the way for future study. This study will improve CSR theories by showing that economic priorities, faith in corporate intentions, direct community impact, and ethical considerations all influence consumer attitudes towards CSR in emerging markets.

Emotions are a crucial but little-studied factor in CRM-driven purchasing decisions. This study will clarify how emotions, both good and negative, affect CRM effectiveness, especially in high-scepticism settings. The study will offer a more sophisticated understanding of emotional marketing by demonstrating the ways in which CRM-driven purchasing decisions are influenced by the interaction of good emotions (trust, empathy) and negative emotions (scepticism, doubt). While rational decision-making is emphasised by traditional consumer behaviour models, this study will focus on the emotional and trust-based mechanisms that influence CRM reactions. The results will cast doubt on Western-centric theories of CRM efficacy and offer a paradigm that takes into account regional socioeconomic conditions and cultural perspectives on CSR. While the influence of CRM on customer behaviour has been studied in the past, less study has looked at how BE mediates and scepticism modifies this process in emerging countries. This study creates a more thorough framework for comprehending CRM effectiveness by combining Lii and Lee's (2012) work on scepticism with Aaker's (1991) brand equity model.

If CRM is shown to be more successful when trust is built first, businesses may need to reconsider how they launch cause-related projects, giving credibility a higher priority than marketing appeal. Policies on corporate responsibility, cause-related collaborations, and CSR transparency in Ghana and comparable economies may be influenced by the findings. This study will provide a new theoretical model that incorporates trust, emotions, and brand credibility into CRM effectiveness research, and it will further academic knowledge by showing that brand equity and scepticism in emerging markets have a significant impact on consumer attitudes towards CSR and emotional purchasing decisions.

The results of this study will be useful to companies in Ghana in a variety of industries, especially those looking to use cause-related marketing (CRM) to improve consumer trust and brand equity (BE). Since scepticism moderates consumer responses and BE affects purchasing behaviour, different industries will need to modify their CRM strategies accordingly. The following are some ways that CRM insights will benefit different industries. Retail brands should incorporate CRM into consumer-friendly, transparent campaigns that don't make products seem expensive. Healthcare providers need long-term, transparent initiatives to overcome scepticism and build public trust. Technology firms should concentrate on community-based initiatives and clear impact metrics to strengthen credibility. Financial

institutions should align CRM efforts with ethical business practices to avoid exacerbating scepticism. Companies in Ghana should customise their CRM strategies based on consumer scepticism levels, brand equity strength, and industry-specific trust dynamics to maximise their efficacy.

Companies in Ghana should take a strategic approach to CRM, making sure that scepticism is handled with openness and sustained dedication. Brand equity enhances CRM credibility. Campaigns are in line with the company's basic principles and societal impact. By putting these insights into practice, business professionals may use CRM to increase brand loyalty, foster deeper consumer trust, and promote significant societal change. Businesses must use strong measurement frameworks that evaluate their influence on consumer behaviour, brand equity (BE), and scepticism levels in order to ensure the success of cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns in Ghana. The study's conclusions may suggest some important strategies and metrics that companies can employ.

Companies must examine how CRM affects scepticism, brand equity, and consumer behaviour in great detail in order to optimise its impact in Ghana. Using real-time data, companies can continuously optimise their CRM efforts to align with changing consumer expectations. A well-designed impact assessment framework will assist businesses in refining CRM campaigns, guaranteeing long-term consumer trust and brand loyalty. Effective CRM measurement ensures that marketing efforts are not just socially responsible but also strategically profitable, creating shared value for both businesses and society. Marketing initiatives that are both strategically profitable and socially conscious are guaranteed by effective CRM measurement, which benefits both companies and society as a whole.

Businesses can integrate cause-related marketing (CRM) with sustainability initiatives to enhance brand equity (BE), reduce consumer scepticism, and build long-term customer loyalty. For CRM campaigns to succeed in emerging markets like Ghana, marketing and PR professionals must ensure regulatory compliance, prioritize transparency, and actively engage consumers in social impact efforts. This will strengthen brand equity, reduce scepticism, and create long-term business success.

## **1.7 Limitations**

Like any research, this study has several drawbacks that should be noted, one of which is the use of a convenience sampling method, which, although practical, may limit the findings' generalisability because convenience sampling depends on readily available respondents, which may result in potential biases in representation. As a result, the study's insights may not fully capture the diverse perspectives of all consumer segments in Ghana, especially those from different socioeconomic backgrounds, rural versus urban settings, or varying levels of brand familiarity and engagement with cause-related marketing (CRM).

Furthermore, the use of a single sampling strategy limits the capacity to generalise results to other demographic groups that might have varying degrees of brand loyalty, scepticism, or views on the efficacy of CRM. For example, high-income earners may prioritise brand equity (BE) differently than lower-income groups, and younger consumers may react differently to CRM campaigns than older consumers. Researchers should think about using stratified or random sampling procedures to guarantee a more representative consumer base in order to increase the robustness and applicability of future studies. Future research could also use longitudinal data collection techniques to track how perceptions of CRM, scepticism, and brand equity change over time, especially in reaction to significant CSR initiatives or changes in the economy.

Furthermore, comparisons across industries would yield deeper insights. Future studies should look into sector-specific reactions to CRM campaigns to create more focused suggestions for companies in Ghana and other emerging economies, as the efficacy of CRM may differ across areas, including retail, telecommunications, finance, and healthcare. Future research can provide a more thorough and broadly applicable knowledge of the connection between CRM, brand equity, and consumer scepticism in emerging economies by overcoming these shortcomings.

The geographic scope of this investigation is yet another significant drawback. Although the study offers insightful information about Ghanaian consumer behaviour and cause-related marketing (CRM), it only looks at two of the sixteen regions in the nation. Because customer views and behaviours about CRM might fluctuate greatly across different locations due to economic, cultural, and infrastructure differences, the findings' limited geographical coverage limits their generalisability. With regional differences in wealth levels, educational attainment, urbanisation, and exposure to corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, Ghana is a

diverse nation. For example, rural customers in the Northern or Volta areas, who can be less exposed to corporate-driven social initiatives, might perceive brand equity and scepticism differently than metropolitan consumers in Accra and Takoradi, where the majority of CRM programs are actively marketed. Furthermore, customers in areas with robust local community networks might be more likely to believe in cause-related marketing initiatives that reflect their social ideals, whereas consumers in areas where corporate intentions are seen with greater scepticism might be more dubious.

Researchers should broaden the scope to include a more diversified sample that spans several regions of Ghana to increase the geographical representativeness of subsequent studies. Businesses could better understand regional variations in CRM success and adjust their marketing tactics with the help of a nationally representative study. Future studies could also examine whether regional economic or cultural aspects affect how consumers react to CRM campaigns by contrasting Ghana's CRM environment with those of other developing West African markets, including Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, or Senegal. A more comprehensive understanding of how CRM techniques might be tailored for success in comparable economic environments would be provided by such comparative research.

Thus, even though this study offers a valuable starting point for comprehending how CRM affects Ghanaian consumers' purchase decisions, care must be taken when extrapolating the findings outside of the particular areas examined. Future studies' external validity would be improved by broadening the geographic scope, providing a more comprehensive understanding of CRM's influence on consumer behaviour in a variety of markets.

In order to capture overall consumer impressions of brand equity (BE), scepticism, and cause-related marketing (CRM) in Ghana, this study looked at a large population sample. Although this method offers a thorough summary, it ignores possible differences between particular consumer cohorts according to age, gender, income, education, and generational influences. CRM initiatives may be met differently by various consumer groups; if these variations are not segmented, significant subtleties in the ways that scepticism and brand equity mediate and reduce CRM effectiveness may be lost.

For example, CRM campaigns that highlight sustainability or ethical business practices may be more appealing to Gen Z and millennial consumers, who are generally more digitally savvy

and socially sensitive. On the other hand, elderly consumers might be more sceptical about CRM initiatives, particularly if they believe they are merely marketing ploys rather than sincere societal benefits. Similarly, whereas lower-income groups may place more importance on the observable advantages of CSR initiatives, like product affordability or direct community effect, high-income consumers may assess CRM campaigns based on brand reputation and alignment with their beliefs.

Cohort-based study approaches, in which consumer groups are examined independently to find age-, income-, or region-specific trends in CRM response, should be taken into consideration in future studies in order to obtain deeper insights. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be useful for monitoring how views towards CRM change over time among various cohorts, particularly in reaction to changes in business transparency, consumer expectations, or economic volatility. Future studies can provide more focused suggestions for companies aiming to tailor CRM campaigns for various demographic groups by integrating cohort-based methodologies. This would make it possible for businesses to create tailored marketing plans that better suit the various customer groups' distinct tastes, driving forces, and degrees of scepticism.

The suggested hypotheses were investigated in this study using a quantitative methodology and survey-based approach, which yielded statistically significant insights into the connections among consumer scepticism, brand equity (BE), cause-related marketing (CRM), and purchasing behaviour. This approach has limits in capturing underlying environmental and psychological aspects that may influence customer perceptions and behaviours, even while it provides unambiguous, empirical evidence and permits large-scale hypothesis testing. While a quantitative approach focuses on numerical data, structured questionnaires, and statistical analysis, these methods may not fully account for the underlying motivations, emotions, and cognitive processes that drive consumer responses to CRM. For instance, a survey may measure the level of scepticism towards CRM campaigns, but it may not explain why certain consumers are more sceptical or how their attitudes are shaped by cultural, emotional, and personal experiences.

Qualitative research could also help identify emotional and psychological factors that influence CRM effectiveness, offering deeper explanations that cannot be captured through purely numerical data. Richer, more nuanced insights into how consumers perceive CRM in Ghana

could be obtained through a qualitative study employing techniques like focus groups, in-depth interviews, or ethnographic studies. This method would enable researchers to investigate how consumers understand brand authenticity in CRM efforts, what particular experiences cause consumers to become sceptical, how CSR initiatives build consumer trust over time, and how emotional and psychological factors influence CRM effectiveness, providing deeper explanations that cannot be captured through purely numerical data.

Using a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews would enable researchers to validate statistical findings while also delving deeper into consumers' lived experiences and perceptions. This approach would be especially helpful in determining whether CRM efforts are perceived as genuine or manipulative, understanding consumer scepticism in emerging markets like Ghana, and examining cultural differences in how brand equity is perceived. For instance, survey data may show a strong correlation between CRM and purchase intention, while follow-up interviews may clarify why particular CRM strategies are more effective than others in particular consumer groups.

The results of quantitative surveys should be supplemented and expanded upon by future research using mixed-method or qualitative methodologies. These methods would integrate consumer narratives and quantifiable trends to offer a more comprehensive view of CRM's influence. In addition to bolstering the theoretical contributions of CRM research, this would provide useful information for companies aiming to customise CRM tactics for certain customer segments in Ghana and other developing markets.

This study used a cross-sectional research approach, which means that information was gathered all at once to examine the connections between consumer scepticism, brand equity (BE), cause-related marketing (CRM), and buying behaviour. This method has limits when it comes to evaluating changes over time and comprehending the long-term implications of CRM methods, even though it is helpful for taking a momentary picture of customer attitudes and behaviours. Although a cross-sectional study offers useful statistical insights, it ignores how consumer views of CRM campaigns, brand trust, and scepticism may change over time as a result of social shifts, corporate crises, economic situations, or sustained brand involvement. A more dynamic knowledge of how CRM affects customer behaviour over time would be possible with a longitudinal research approach, which collects data at several periods in time. Using a longitudinal strategy in future studies has several important advantages.

Depending on their individual brand experiences, media exposure, or shifting social norms, customers may grow increasingly or less dubious of CRM activities over time. A longitudinal study could ascertain whether frequent exposure to CRM initiatives results in an increase or decrease in scepticism.

Brand equity is not created overnight; rather, it grows over time as a result of consumers' interactions with a brand. A longitudinal study would assist in determining whether CRM efforts result in long-term brand loyalty and trust or if the effects diminish over time.

Although consumers may respond favourably to CRM initiatives at first, does this translate into long-term brand commitment? A cross-sectional study only records an immediate response, whereas a longitudinal approach could reveal whether CRM creates repeat business and customer retention. Consumer scepticism may be influenced over time by changes in the economy, concerns about business transparency, and changing cultural views. Researchers would be able to examine how outside factors impact customers' reactions to CRM initiatives through longitudinal research.

To expand on the results of this study, future research should use a longitudinal approach to look at how consumer attitudes towards CRM change over the course of months or even years. They could monitor whether consumers become less sceptical as brands show a sustained commitment to social causes or whether CRM fatigue sets in and makes them doubt the sincerity of such initiatives. Additionally, longitudinal research would enable comparisons across industries, assisting businesses in developing CRM strategies that promote long-term customer engagement and trust in emerging markets like Ghana.

### **1.8 Delimitation**

The results of the study cannot be easily generalised due to several key limitations in the sample selection. First, the data was collected from shopping malls in only two cities, Accra and Takoradi, while the study aimed to cover the entirety of Ghanaian shoppers. This geographic limitation reduces the representativeness of the sample, as consumer behaviour in these two cities may not accurately reflect that of shoppers in other regions of Ghana. Accra and Takoradi, although cosmopolitan, are distinct in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, regional cultures, and consumer habits.

Additionally, the cosmopolitan nature of these cities, which includes a diverse mix of people from different parts of Ghana, may not be fully representative of rural or less urbanised areas. People in smaller towns or rural regions may have different purchasing behaviours, levels of scepticism toward Cause-Related Marketing (CRM), or perceptions of Brand Equity (BE). The assumption that the results can be applied to other cities, based solely on their cosmopolitan status, is risky as it overlooks potential regional differences in consumer behaviour.

To provide a thorough understanding of consumer responses to cause-related marketing (CRM), brand equity (BE), and scepticism across various demographics and geographic locations, this study should have included a nationally representative sample of Ghanaian shoppers. However, due to time and resource constraints, data collection was restricted to shopping malls in two specific regions of Ghana. Although this approach gathers insights from a segment of Ghanaian consumers, it does not fully reflect the diverse purchasing behaviours, socio-economic backgrounds, and regional differences that exist throughout the nation.

Rural consumers, who might have varying degrees of exposure to CRM efforts, brand awareness, and purchasing power, were under-represented in the study because shopping malls are primarily found in urban regions. Rural populations' views of corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts may be very different from urban customers' because they tend to rely more on local companies and informal markets. Region-specific differences exist in Ghana's economic environment, with some regions having more brand exposure and disposable money and others having lower consumer purchasing power and varying degrees of scepticism towards corporate endeavours. The study's narrow emphasis on two regions restricts the applicability of its findings to the whole nation because consumer preferences and brand trust may vary between Ghana's northern and southern regions, as well as between industrialised and agricultural areas.

The study mostly covers the viewpoints of middle- to high-income customers who shop in formal retail settings because data was only gathered from shopping malls. Nonetheless, a sizable section of Ghana's populace works in informal trade, local shops, and traditional marketplaces, where they may be less exposed to CRM campaigns and exhibit consumer scepticism in various ways. To provide a more balanced picture of CRM efficacy in Ghana, future study should think about incorporating respondents from a variety of retail settings, including supermarkets, open markets, and e-commerce platforms.

Future research can offer a more comprehensive and representative understanding of how CRM influences consumer behaviour across various Ghanaian market segments by addressing these delimitations. Expand data collection to multiple regions throughout Ghana, ensuring a broader representation of urban, peri-urban, and rural consumers; diversify sampling locations beyond shopping malls to include traditional markets, supermarkets, and online shopping platforms to capture a wider range of consumer demographics; use stratified sampling methods to ensure representation from different income levels, educational backgrounds, and shopping habits; and incorporate qualitative insights (e.g., focus groups or interviews) to understand regional and cultural differences in attitudes towards CRM, BE, and scepticism.

### **1.9 Overview of Methodology**

This study investigates the relationship between cause-related marketing (CRM) and consumer purchasing behaviour in Ghana, focusing on brand equity as a mediator and consumer scepticism as a moderator. The research methodology is designed to quantify these relationships, test hypotheses derived from existing theories, and provide generalizable insights for marketing practices within the Ghanaian context. The methodology integrates philosophical underpinnings, research design, and analytical techniques to ensure rigor and reliability. The study uses a quantitative approach to measure relationships between CRM, brand equity, scepticism, and purchasing behaviour. This approach is well-suited for testing hypotheses derived from existing theories and generalizing findings to a broader population. A convenience sampling technique was deployed in this study. Explanatory research design was adopted in this study. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is ideal for complex models with mediation and moderation effects. PLS-SEM was chosen for its ability to handle non-normal data distributions, small-to-moderate sample sizes, and latent variable relationships. Data was collected for six weeks from consumers in two shopping malls, particularly Accra and Takoradi.

### **1.10 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics may be defined as set standard norms of functioning. According to Banerjee (2024), some affect participants as well as those who are associated with “falsifying” data analysis and

misrepresenting data. The preceding author summarises some of the most important ethical agreements that prevail in social research as having to do with voluntary participation and causing no harm to the participants, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, and not deceiving the subjects of the research. To ensure conformance to the above, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from DUT- Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) and sought permission of voluntary participation through informed consent from participants. On the other hand, the participants were assured of anonymity. This is in line with Moriña (2021), who argues that to ensure anonymity, the information provided by the participants should in no way reveal their identity. All data, both electronic and printed transcripts, will be stored in encrypted files or a locked, secured location for five years after the publication of this research, after which all files would be destroyed in line with Durban University Ethical guidelines. Accessibility to the data will be restricted to only DUT and the researcher. The electronically generated data was stored on the laptop of the researcher and password-protected, thereby making it accessible to only the researcher.

### **1.11 Organisation of the Study**

The study's limitations, delimitation, and context are all detailed in the first chapter, along with the problem statement, goals, objectives, justification, and structure of the entire thesis. While Chapter 3 covers the theoretical review, hypothesis construction, and conceptual framework for this thesis, Chapter 2 concentrates on the review of conceptual literature. Outlining the design and methods used for data collection and analysis, Chapter 4 discusses the research process. The chapter argues in favour of using specific research methods. Also covered in length are topics like population, sample, measuring tools, validity, reliability, anonymity, confidentiality, research activity plan, and ethics. Chapter 5 focuses on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the survey data. We used both descriptive and inferential statistics to measure, analyse, and interpret the data. The study's objectives, research findings, summary, conclusions, suggestions based on the study's findings, limitations, and ideas for additional research are all thoroughly explained in Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the different interpretations and viewpoints of the CRM idea, the origin of CRM, the relationship between CSR and CRM, and the benefits and effects of cause campaigns on consumer purchasing behaviour. It will also discuss and examine the meaning and dimensions of BE and how this influences consumer purchasing behaviour (purchase intention). The chapter further examines the concept of scepticism and its influence on consumers' response towards CRM campaigns and subsequent purchase intentions and ultimately explores consumer purchasing behaviour and how CRM influences it.

#### **2.2 Definitions and Perspectives of Cause-Related Marketing**

Within the business world, CRM is becoming more and more popular as a tactic to draw in customers who want to strategically support social concerns by making purchases. According to the International Event Group (IEG), the amount of money that corporations are expected to donate as a result of CRM is expected to exceed \$2.23 billion in 2019, which is a roughly 5% increase from 2018 (Chang and Kwak 2023). CRM is the practice of a business offering to contribute a specific sum to a registered charity when clients participate in revenue-generating transactions that satisfy both organisational and personal objectives (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988: 60). Both companies and society at large benefit from CRM since it enables them to generate revenue while simultaneously supporting a deserving cause (Sindhu 2022).

Businesses can take part in a variety of CRM campaigns. Traditional CRM and one-for-one

corporate tie-ins are two of the most popular (Rapert, Thyroff, and Grace 2021). A company's donation of a portion of its sales or revenue to a certain charity is considered traditional cause-related (Kopalle et al. 2022). For instance, Patagonia donates one per cent of its sales to sustainability initiatives while selling outdoor apparel and accessories. The natural food company Newman's Own gives up 100% of its earnings to charitable organisations. When a business provides a matching item for each item sold, this is known as a one-for-one CRM (Chang et al., 2023). For each pair of TOMS shoes sold, the company contributes a pair. Similarly, Pampers nappies and UNICEF collaborated to distribute tetanus vaccines as part of a campaign in which one pack of nappies was equivalent to one dose of the vaccine.

CRM is a popular corporate social responsibility strategy that involves working with a nonprofit or worthy cause to increase sales and positive consumer behaviour (Deb, Sharma, and Amawate 2021). Though CRM and CSR are sometimes used interchangeably, CRM is only one aspect of CSR (Iglesias et al. 2020; Nguyen et al. 2023; Suryavanshi et al. 2023) and should not be mistaken for CSR in its entirety (Kulshreshtha *et al.* 2019). CRM is a marketing strategy that connects philanthropic fundraising to the purchase of a company's products or services to achieve two objectives: improve corporate performance and support worthy causes, according to Duarte and Silva (2018). Economic incentives, social norms that support altruistic behaviour, or ingrained values that lead to proper behaviour, can all influence consumers' responses to CRM appeals. CRM is a marketing approach that, as part of a promotional effort, connects a company with a social cause to provide win-win results, claim Nelson and Vilela (2017).

Marketing tactics that promote societal progress, human welfare, security, and well-being are linked to social responsibility, claim Kumar and Bansal (2017). A corporation and a non-profit work together to collect funds and advance social problems as part of CRM, a form of corporate social responsibility. Companies can participate in CRM by designating a portion of their sales revenue from customers to support a particular charity or cause. Businesses can demonstrate their support for social and environmental issues in this way, which may also draw in new clients who are eager to support causes close to their hearts. CRM frequently links a customer's purchase to a business's charitable gift (Lopes, Bairrada and de Matos 2023; Galan-Ladero, Galera-Casquet and Alves 2021).

We may contextualise CRM by examining marketing 3.0, which Kotler et al. (2023) define as viewing customers as more than simply individuals but as whole human beings with passions and spirits who are searching for methods to alleviate their worries in the hopes of bettering the

world. CRM is a subset of a larger idea known as CSR (Patel *et al.* 2023). According to Carroll (2021a), this concept has changed and resurfaced since the 1950s and takes the shape of a pyramid in which a company's charitable, legal, ethical, and social duties all help it become a more involved part of the community.

"Cause-related marketing" is the technique of linking a company's financial operations to a social purpose, with the profits created supporting the chosen cause (Sodero 2022). CRM serves as a three-pillar platform that unites businesses, customers, and non-profits or causes, enabling them to interact positively and merging charity, personal needs, individual concerns, and firm goals (Cosgrave and O'Dwyer 2020). CRM is not a brand-new idea, and there are numerous ways that corporations can use it. For instance, they might adopt a socially conscious and sustainable marketing strategy that places a high value on involvement with charitable causes and non-profit organisations, or they can just make small donations (Srivastava 2020).

According to Bae (2016: 811), CRM stands for "a specific type of corporate social initiative". CRM is one sort of CSR action (Go and Bortree 2017); however, CSR is a more inclusive term that covers legal and ethical behaviour, sustainability, and CRM practices (Kotler and Keller 2016). CRM differs from social marketing in that it is cause-driven, whereas social marketing is the product of a non-profit or governmental organisation and encompasses a greater variety of communication strategies intended to enhance the welfare of consumers and society at large by promoting behavioural change. Branding or product placement that links a company's name or product to a particular cause is known as CRM. A company's primary objective is to support the non-profit organisation and boost sales and corporate image (Zhao *et al.* 2021).

More specifically, CRM is a partnership between a nonprofit organisation and a for-profit company that seeks to boost charitable efforts while integrating ethical business marketing (Chaabouni, Jridi and Bakini 2020). CRM is categorised as a type of leveraged marketing communications strategy that tries to capitalise on consumers' favourable associations with another object (like a cause) (Bergkvist and Mazodier 2018).

According to the Anjali and Menon (2024), CRM has evolved as a significant strategy that intertwines corporate social responsibility with marketing efforts, fostering partnerships between nonprofit organizations and profit organizations to achieve mutual goals (Stötzer and Kaltenbrunner, 2024). The literature reveals that CRM not only enhances brand equity by

aligning brand values with social causes but also influences consumer attitudes towards advertisements, particularly through the interaction of brand and cause-related dimensions (Jublee et al., 2023). Philosophically, the attribution theory plays a crucial role in understanding consumer perceptions in CRM, as it suggests that consumers attribute the motivations behind a brand's involvement in social causes, which can enhance or diminish brand equity depending on perceived authenticity (Anjali and Menon, 2024; Singh and Pathak, 2023). CRM has gained significant attention in the marketing literature due to its potential impact on consumer behaviour and brand equity. A study by Fernandes et al. (2024), highlights the relationship between CRM and brand loyalty, emphasizing the importance of understanding how consumers evaluate companies' CRM campaigns through attribution theory. Lagomarsino and Lemarié, (2022) suggest that, companies engaging in CRM must demonstrate a sincere commitment to social causes to gain consumer support. This aligns with the notion that companies spend billions on social responsibility initiatives like CRM to enhance brand equity. The theory suggests that consumers attribute positive or negative outcomes to a company's actions, influencing their perceptions of the brand. The literature also suggests that CRM messages embedded in advertisements can elicit more positive consumer responses compared to those without such messages (Adewole, 2024). In understanding the relationship between CRM and branding theories, it is essential to consider how CRM influences brand activism and consumer perceptions (Lagomarsino and Lemarié, (2022). The attribution theory may play a role in how consumers attribute motives to companies engaging in CRM efforts (Bae, 2020).

Additionally, Aaker's Brand Equity theory emphasizes the importance of brand reputation and stakeholder perceptions in building brand value (Adewole, 2024). The systematic review of CRM literature highlights its versatility among CSR initiatives (Bhatti et al., 2024). Overall, the perspectives of cause-related marketing are intertwined with theories of attribution and brand equity. Companies leveraging CRM must navigate consumer scepticism and message engagement to effectively communicate their commitment to social causes and enhance brand value (Adewole, 2024). Understanding the impact of CRM on brand reputation and stakeholder perceptions is crucial for building a strong brand identity and fostering consumer loyalty (Bae, 2020; Bhatti et al., 2024). Aaker's Brand Equity theory further supports this by emphasizing that brand associations formed through CRM initiatives can significantly impact consumer loyalty and brand perception, thereby reinforcing the importance of strategic alignment between brand identity and social causes (Jublee et al., 2023; Bakshi and Verma, 2023).

### **2.3 The Origins of Cause-Related Marketing**

CRM is a novel and relatively new tactic related to CSR. CRM refers to the branding or product placement that associates a company's name or product with a specific cause. CRM is a partnership between a for-profit company and a social cause that tries to integrate ethical commercial marketing with the growth of charitable efforts (Chaabouni, Jridi, and Bakini 2020).

The phrase "cause-related marketing" originated with the American Express campaign in 1983 to support the Statue of Liberty's refurbishment. Apart from American Express's \$1,7 million contribution to the renovation, the campaign led to a 28% increase in card usage and a notable rise in the number of new cards issued, all while projecting an image of a responsible and patriotic business (Singh and Pathak 2023). According to Lopes, Bairrada, and de Matos (2023), American Express referred to their sponsorship of more than 45 causes between 1981 and 1984 as "cause-related marketing." CRM stands apart because the company's charitable contributions are directly linked to the customer's involvement with the campaign (Lopes, Bairrada, and de Matos 2023). However, it is unique and successful since it involves a purchase and a combination of promotional activities and charity purposes to enhance the company's and brand's reputation (Key et al. 2021). Because of this, CRM is special and valuable (AlQershi, Mokhtar, and Abas 2020).

According to Varadarajan and Menon (1988:60), the first conceptualisation of CRM was as follows: CRM is the process of developing and carrying out marketing initiatives that are distinguished by a firm's promise to donate a certain sum to a chosen charity when clients participate in revenue-generating transactions that meet organisational goals. Afterwards Varadarajan and Menon's groundbreaking 1988 article on CRM, the concept has grown to become a valuable mainstream marketing tool and a global phenomenon nearly three decades afterwards (Christofi et al. 2020a; Cosgrave and O'Dwyer 2020; Ferraris et al. 2020; Bennett 2023). With average yearly growth rates of over 12% at the start of this decade, CRM is the sponsorship spending approach with the quickest rate of increase in the US (Das et al. 2020; Chawla and Gupta 2021). Another definition of CRM is the marketing strategy of allocating a predetermined portion of product sales proceeds to approved nonprofit organisations (Thomas and Jadeja 2021).

## 2.4 Cause-related Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility

CRM is an innovative and contemporary tool of CSR (Gupta and Handa 2024; Vrontis Christofi and Katsikeas 2020). CRM is a type of CSR because it encompasses initiatives like cause marketing, corporate giving, and socially responsible behaviours. (Coffie and Hinson 2021; Vrontis Christofi and Katsikeas 2020). Over the last few decades, the concept of CSR has evolved and altered, earning significant attention in the media and public conversation. Organisations now consider social and environmental concerns alongside commercial ones when making business choices. The term "corporate social responsibility" refers to all socially responsible measures that a firm does as part of its financial, environmental, and social initiatives (Chang, Chen, and Tsai 2022).

CRM is beneficial to businesses because customers favour companies that practice social responsibility and environmental responsibility (Barboza 2019; Freitas *et al.* 2021). One such advantage is that customers like companies that care, therefore they are willing to pay a premium for items provided by companies engaged in CRM (Kolling *et al.* 2022). Recent research demonstrated that investing in CSR can improve a company's bottom line and increase customer retention and positive attitudes towards the company (Le 2023; Kaul and Luo 2018), CRM has grown in importance for decision-makers (Ha 2017). CRM integration has become necessary in the field of marketing, where it has changed conventional marketing ideas into socially responsible marketing, or marketing that considers social, ethical, and environmental factors.

CRM is a cutting-edge marketing technique that makes it easier to strike a balance between a company's financial objectives, customer needs, and societal interests. It can serve as a symbol for ethical marketing practices. To further a "good cause" and accomplish the firms' own financial and non-financial goals, it encourages partnerships between corporations and non-profit organisations (Silva *et al.* 2021). According to Reichel, Rudnicka and Socha (2023), CRM is a cutting-edge instrument of CSR that enables businesses to balance their marketing goals with the demands of society. Lamrhari *et al.* (2022) describe CRM as a very appealing marketing tactic, while Bhatti, Galan-Ladero and Galera-Casquet (2023) see it as a fundraising innovation.

In reality, this idea is driven by a combination of marketing goals and rational socially

conscious motivations. Therefore, CRM is an expression of CSR rather than a synonym for it. There is a thin line between CRM and CSR from the standpoint of social responsibility (Patil and Rahman 2023). In contrast to CRM, which is when a corporation donates time and resources to a specific charity or any worthy cause, CSR is an endeavour made by a company for the benefit of society (Sindhu 2022). CSR, according to Musova, Poliacikova, and Bartosova (2022), is the company's obligation to address the monetary, ethical, legal, and discretionary demands that society places on companies at any particular time.

This term is open to interpretation and is not all-inclusive. It aids businesses in displaying their ideals and taking accountability. The truth is that CSR can be somewhat cause-specific, involving CRM either entirely or to a certain extent. Although it can be a component of businesses' ethical efforts, CRM is insufficient to properly capture this idea (Chang and Chu 2020; Schump et al. 2023). According to Ferraris et al. (2020), CRM has an impact on customers' perceptions and is a component of CSR performance. Regardless of whether this type of action is motivated by economic or pure charity, the primary objective of CRM from a marketing perspective is to boost consumer demand, as defined by Varadarajan and Menon (1988) as a method for generating money while doing good.

CSR initiatives include socially responsible activities, corporate charity, and cause marketing. However, CRM is a type of CSR that aims to accomplish both the marketing promotion goals and the organisation's philanthropic goals (Bhatti, Galan-Ladero and Galera-Casquet 2023; Fan *et al.* 2020). CRM is the most widely used CSR practice worldwide, notwithstanding the existence of other variations (Vrontis, Christofi and Katsikeas 2020). CRM is a business promotional initiative in which customers donate a portion of their purchases to a non-profit organisation's charitable fund or social purpose (Deb and Amawate 2021). In Asian nations like India, the use of CRM as a marketing tactic has grown dramatically (Thomas and Jadeja 2021).

Businesses use CSR, especially CRM, as a marketing strategy to improve the behavioural intents of their clients (Thomas et al., 2024). For example, as part of its CSR programme, online retailer Amazon.com established a different website known as AmazonSmile. Every time a customer purchased from the AmazonSmile portal, 0.5% of the sales earnings went straight to

the customer's preferred charity. The AmazonSmile Foundation has made \$377 million in charitable contributions since the portal's introduction in 2013 thanks to purchase-induced contributions from eligible purchases made by consistent Customers of Amazon (Chen 2022). Bhatti, Galan-Ladero, and Galera-Casquet (2023) claim that businesses worldwide have been starting an increasing number of CRM initiatives. Because consumers are increasingly more familiar with the phrases "product distribution" and "marketing," corporate social responsibility (CSR) issues have become a significant determinant of public opinion (Sindhu 2022). Consumers are a significant stakeholder group, and numerous research has focused on their CSR assessments (Quan et al. 2022).

## **2.5 Benefits of Cause-Related Marketing**

Companies use CRM for many purposes, including boosting customer loyalty, influencing consumer attitudes, and developing their brand (Park, Kim, and Kwon 2017). Businesses that implement CRM initiatives also directly benefit their customers. A favourable impression is important, but it does not always result in a purchase. Operating in a socially responsible manner can considerably help a company during the decision-making process. Academic researchers have demonstrated that brands can benefit significantly from this. Planning and carrying out a successful CRM project requires an understanding of consumer views and, subsequently, behaviour (Musova, Poliacikova and Bartosova 2022).

The main motivations for a business to engage in CRM initiatives are boosting sales and improving customer connections, as seen by the increased inclination to purchase advertised goods or repeat business (Bianchi, Daponte and Pirard 2020). The fact is that CRM draws in customers and fosters a special and robust relationship between them and the brand. Building connections with respectable non-profits and well-known causes can improve a business's standing in the community, boost its brand, and increase its visibility across the country (Christofi *et al.* 2020a; Schamp *et al.* 2023; Mendini, Peter and Gibbert 2018).

This tool can be employed as part of a bigger campaign to placate angry public or consumer groups, or it can be quite effective in fighting unfavourable press. Cha and Rajadhyaksha (2021) state that assisting charitable organisations, communities, and causes can benefit a company's human resources by, for example, raising employees' morale, increasing their

productivity, or fostering loyalty. CRM has the potential to increase brand recognition, strengthen BE, establish brand credibility, and stimulate brand interaction (Jubilee, Kasilingam and Stephen 2023; Schamp *et al.* 2023). According to Lu *et al.* (2020) and Polat and Çetinsöz (2021), brand loyalty is becoming more and more recognised as being essential to a company's long-term productivity and as having the potential to boost its market share. Endorsing a certain cause might yield multiple benefits. For example, cause marketing initiatives enable businesses to engage with consumers and demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility. CRM is a potent tool for connecting with customers emotionally, in contrast to traditional marketing communications methods (Tanford, Kim and Kim 2020). This marketing tactic can create differentiation from rivals, enhance and maintain a positive reputation and image among consumers, and increase brand value (Rezaee Vessal *et al.* 2023). Together, these advantages have the potential to favourably affect consumers' attitudes and purchasing patterns.

The benefits of CRM for donor organisations have been recognised for some time (Christofi *et al.* 2020a). These benefits include purchase intentions (Handa and Gupta 2020), corporate reputation (Badenes-Rocha, Bigné, E. and Ruiz 2022; Rego and Hamilton 2022), and positive word-of-mouth persuasion (Chaabouni, Jridi and Bakini 2021; Bergkvist and Zhou, 2021). According to several studies (Thomas *et al.* 2021; Handa and Gupta 2020; Rezaee Vessal *et al.* 2023), some have even suggested that CRM may provide a sustained competitive edge. This might be an overstatement in that nowadays, CRM is neither unique nor uncommon, but it can provide fleeting advantages in terms of distinctiveness or competitiveness.

CRM is essential to brand strategic management because, as the market changes, brand building is less about product features and more about establishing a genuine, personal connection with customers, moving them from merely consuming to passionately believing in the business (Lopes, Bairrada and de Matos 2023; Gonçalves Filho, Chinelato and Prado 2024). It is necessary to bring up attribution theory to comprehend how consumers perceive altruism in CRM. According to this notion, customers analyse and attempt to comprehend the rationale behind a business's CRM efforts. Depending on how the business positions its CRM initiatives, these motivations may be altruistic or self-serving (Lopes, Bairrada, and Coelho 2024)

According to Cao et al. (2021), CRM actions help create a positive brand image, particularly when this image is associated with humanitarian causes. Customers view businesses more favourably when they support causes that are important to them (Ferraris *et al.* 2020). Research validates the effectiveness of promoting social concerns to influence consumer choice and increase sales for the sponsoring business (Pandy, Bajpai and Tiwari 2023). Additionally, research shows that CRM can be effectively employed as an offensive tactic to attract clients and generate sales (Gao *et al.* 2020).

A core tenet of CRM is that, when done correctly, it helps all parties involved, generating a win-win-win strategy. Businesses realize a boost in sales and a better corporate image (Tučková and Balcarová 2023), and non-profit organisations gain an increase in public awareness, and, therefore, donations (Chaabouni, Jridi and Bakini 2021; Bergkvist and Zhou 2021), and consumers enjoy using the product and the satisfaction that comes with supporting charitable causes (Christofi *et al.* 2020a; Schamp *et al.* 2023). Research indicates that businesses with robust CRM records are more equipped to uphold excellent client interactions (Go and Bortree 2017) and improve behavioural intentions for American consumers (Zapata-Ramos and Kim 2018), therefore it is important to better understand how firms can be more effective with their CRM efforts.

Businesses participate in CRM for a variety of reasons, including boosting their brand image, influencing consumer attitudes, or building customer loyalty (Kim, Jang and Kim 2022; Fan *et al.* 2020). Customers also gain from businesses that participate in CRM initiatives. While positive perception is important, it does not always translate into a purchase decision (as each consumer makes their own decisions based on a variety of factors), so it is worth investigating how businesses' responsible marketing practices affect this process. As a result, predicting consumer attitudes and, ultimately, behaviour, is crucial to the design and execution of a successful CRM campaign (Schamp *et al.* 2023).

According to academic research, companies that operate in a socially responsible manner foster positive word-of-mouth, consumer trust, and affective commitment (Cuesta-Valiño *et al.* 2023;

Ahmad, *et al.* 2023). With these kinds of benefits, managers simply must include CRM on their agendas. CRM is turning into a useful and profitable marketing tool that businesses utilise for a variety of purposes, including boosting sales, reputation, image, and performance (Ferraris *et al.* 2020). Additionally, this promotional technique can distinguish the brand from rivals, enhance and maintain a favourable reputation and image among customers, and provide value to the brand (Vrontis, Christofi, and Katsikeas 2020; Santoro *et al.* 2020). When combined, these benefits may positively influence the attitudes and purchasing patterns of consumers. Nonetheless, some recent research has shown that CRM actions are more likely to be viewed with mistrust than other CSR projects like sponsorship or donation (Chang and Kwak 2023; Vrontis, Christofi, and Katsikeas 2020). According to Thomas and Kureshi (2020), this is because CRM activities usually require consumer purchases, which could lead to a less positive interpretation of the relationship between the company's revenues and the cause.

CRM has been utilised to boost market share (e.g., American Express donated three cents to Share Our Strength each time an American Express Card was used), appeal to a new market segment (e.g., BMW launched The Ultimate Drive in 1996, where it donated US\$1 to breast cancer research for every BMW test driven by a woman to target women), and differentiate (e.g., Tesco started Computers for Schools to differentiate from Sainsbury's in the UK by offering vouchers to customers for every £25 spent which the customer could "donate" to a participating school). In the case of Tesco, the schools gathered the vouchers, which they exchanged for Tesco laptops, and cultivated a positive brand image. Another example is The Body Shop which advertises that by sourcing goods from less developed nations they are creating jobs. CRM is one of the marketing initiatives that has grown the quickest in the past 20 years, with corporate expenditure on it in the US rising from \$120 million in 1990 to a projected \$2 billion in 2016 (Singh and Duque 2020).

CRM gives the brand a powerful point of differentiation, which adds value to the perimeter (Vrontis *et al.* 2020a). Researchers have found that CRM promotional actions are highly prevalent in developing economies such as India (Thomas and Jadeja 2021). The favourable impact CRM initiatives have on sponsors, charities, and customers contributes to their success. Sponsors enhance their brand and establish enduring relationships with clients, which raises

the probability that products related to the cause will be bought (Cornwell and Kwon 2020; Koronios *et al.* 2022; Jensen and Cornwell 2021). Donation budgets are increased by charities, enabling them to assist more individuals more frequently. Customers gain because they are given the chance to satisfy their needs for status, pride, and self- satisfaction (Amin and Herjanto 2023).

## **2.6 Challenges in Cause-Related Marketing**

The most problematic part of CRM is usually how customers utilise this capability. Due to their inability to perceive the link between the cause and the product, customers may often be dubious about CRM initiatives or believe that CRM is just a way to promote a product or cause to boost company profits (Schamp *et al.* 2023). Another kind of scepticism lurks in the belief held by customers that since the amount donated for each product purchased is so tiny, it cannot have a meaningful impact or benefit non-profit partners and causes. Furthermore, when customers may believe that the business behaves inconsistently and with insufficient responsibility (Kim and Park 2020; Swaen, Demoulin and Pauwels-Delassus 2021). "Cause" is another area that can present issues. According to Aghakhani, Carvalho and Cunningham, (2021), people who disagree with the cause that the company supports will feel uncomfortable with the CRM marketing.

According to Kottasz, MacQuillin and Bennett (2022), a risky issue arises when customers do not think their donations will go towards non-profit organisations. Furthermore, if a charity is linked to bad press, Concerns regarding the non-profit partner the business is linked with may make some shoppers hesitant to purchase these goods. From a managerial standpoint, there are issues related to the time, focus, and financial resources used for the planning and execution of CRM campaigns (Thomas, Kureshi and Vatawala 2020). For instance, drafting a contract that outlines contribution requirements requires more thought and effort than other socially conscious endeavours. Reaching a fair frequency threshold and reaching the intended audience, the process of realisation frequently necessitates investment in paid promotions in addition to complex accounting techniques (Stremersch *et al.* 2023). Recent studies have revealed that in contrast to traditional CSR programs such as funding or charitable activity, CRM endeavours have a greater probability of being seen with scepticism (Vrontis, Christofi and Katsikeas

2020; Christofi *et al.* 2020a). This is because CRM initiatives typically necessitate consumer purchases; as a result, they can be perceived negatively if there is a link between the company's profits and the cause. The last 30 years have seen managers and academics attempt to explain its efficacy (Ferraris *et al.* 2020) but the benefits are sometimes called into doubt because CRM initiatives are seen as vague, deceptive, and improper, particularly in the context of advertising and among specific global audiences (Eastman, Smalley and Warren 2019). Previous studies have focused on the unique shopping habits of millennials (Ivanova *et al.* 2019), revealing the effectiveness of CRM programmes.

CRM programmes have faced criticism and scepticism despite their benefits, particularly concerning the business-related incentive behind the initiative. Because it is linked to sales flows (for example, when a company sells expensive products), customers often believe that it is taking advantage of the situation to boost profits (Santoro *et al.* 2020; Thomas, Bhatt and Patel 2022). Another factor contributing to scepticism is the typically small donation made by CRM or the requirement for a transaction involving goods or services (Sindhu 2022; Schamp *et al.* 2023). Critics contend that rather than making product purchases, customers ought to make direct donations to non-profit organisations. Additionally, research indicates that, at least when it comes to immediate sales, the benefits of CRM may not always outweigh the costs (Das *et al.* 2020; Schamp *et al.* 2023). However, in industrialised nations like the United States, Australia, Canada, Norway, and Korea, as well as growing nations like India, CRM continues to be one of the marketing methods with the fastest pace of development. (Christofi *et al.* 2020a; Thomas and Kureshi 2020).

## **2.7 Effect of Cause Campaigns on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour**

In marketing, a CRM campaign is one in which the corporation promises to contribute a specified amount of money to a charitable organisation for each sale made. According to a study by Thomas, Kureshi and Vatavwala (2020), to strengthen brand purchase intention ties, many businesses employ CRM. Customers, on the other hand, are equally interested in the company's CRM activities since they can differentiate themselves by purchasing goods that support a cause. Therefore, to fully capitalise on all potential benefits, a business needs to inform its customers about its CRM efforts (Vrontis Christofi and Katsikeas 2020). The term

"purchase intention" (behaviour) describes how a buyer responds to a product, including whether they decide to buy it, suggest it to others, or ask questions about it. An indicator of a customer's likelihood of acquiring a particular item is purchase intention; the higher the intention, the more probable the buyer is to make a purchase. (Rosillo-Díaz, Blanco-Encomienda and Crespo-Almendros 2020; Sohn and Kim 2020; Costa *et al.* 2021). Sales have been shown to rise sharply as a result of effective CRM campaigns. Customers are more inclined to buy the product linked to the cause-brand partnership when they feel that the cause is relevant to them (e Silva *et al.* 2020; Srivastava 2020; Handa and Gupta 2020). Customers who strongly identify with social concerns are therefore more likely to have positive opinions about the brand and to be more inclined to make a purchase. Research has indicated that CRM positively influences consumers' inclination to buy (Indiani and Febriandari 2021; Arachchi and Samarasinghe 2022). Customers are also more inclined to spend more for businesses that employ CRM (Chang and Chu 2020). Thus, by processing CRM-based data, CRM generates favourable ideas about favourable buying behaviours, which in turn results in an intention to buy a particular brand compared to other brands (Uhlrig, Mainardes and Nossa 2019; Arachchi and Samarasinghe 2022). Additionally, positive perceptions of the brand and brand recognition increase when customers are aware of CRM efforts which positively influences purchase intention (Ramesh *et al.* 2018).

The literature on the effect of CRM campaigns on consumer purchasing behaviour reveals a complex interplay with brand equity, consumer scepticism, and overall purchasing intentions. CRM has been shown to enhance brand image and perceived quality, which in turn positively influences purchase intentions (Deb and Amawate, 2020; Homssi *et al.*, 2023). However, consumer scepticism can negatively moderate these relationships, suggesting that while CRM can foster brand loyalty, its effectiveness may be diminished if consumers doubt the authenticity of the brand's motives (Homssi *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, anthropomorphized messaging in CRM has been found to enhance emotional connections, promoting systematic information processing that further encourages prosocial behaviour and purchase intentions among consumers (Devi and Arumugam, 2024). The Indian pharmaceutical sector exemplifies this dynamic, where CRM initiatives significantly impact purchase intentions, particularly when consumers are actively involved with the cause (Pandey *et al.*, 2023).

Customers' opinions on a certain brand, product, or service, whether favourable or negative, are summarised as brand attitude, which might result in a particular psychological tendency (Manosuthi, Lee and Han 2020). Customers' positive purchasing intentions are formed and predicted in large part by their brand attitudes (McClure and Seock 2020; Kumar, Prakash and Kumar 2021). Purchase intention, according to Ramesh et al. (2018), is a customer's behavioural attitude, which is not the same as their feelings towards a brand. Rather, it is the reason behind or deliberate plan for an action they will take. Therefore, brand attitude can have a very favourable impact on consumers' purchasing decisions when used as part of a marketing strategy in a CRM setting. When employed as part of a marketing plan in a CRM scenario, brand attitude plays a critical role in shaping customers' decisions and behaviours connected to brand choices. It can have a very favourable impact on consumers' purchasing decisions and behavioural intentions (Lee et al. 2020). Arachchi and Samarasinghe (2022) compared South and Southeast Asia in their study, Corporate Social Responsibility towards Purchase Intention across Regional Identity. Found that purchase intention and CRM in Sri Lanka's retail industry had a high positive link during COVID-19. This result is consistent with Sen Gupta and Wadera's (2020) study, which also found comparable results, confirming that CRM has a favourable impact on purchase intention in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. When consumers think that service providers are morally upright businesses that respect social responsibility, they are more likely to promote positive word-of-mouth and show buy intention (Dang, Nguyen, and Pervan 2020). Silva et al. (2020) discovered that reliable CRM activity had a beneficial effect on customers' intentions to make purchases.

Customers have positive impressions of CRM, businesses that support social issues, and CRM-sponsored charitable organisations, according to some CRM research (e.g., Vrontis Christofi and Katsikeas 2020; Fan et al. 2020). These favourable sentiments may encourage customers to purchase specific brands and goods in addition to raising awareness of a given social issue (Ferraris et al. 2020; Chang, Chu, and Tsai 2021). Terblanche, Boshoff and Human-Van Eck (2023) used a sample of students to show that when an advertisement with a CRM message was shown, the students' sentiments about the organisation were more positive than when the message contained no CRM. Prior research has used surveys to find out how customers feel

about CRM. Ferraris et al. (2020), for instance, found that nearly half of their respondents bought a product or service to contribute to a charity cause.

Nearly half of respondents to a telephone survey by Mirzaei, Webster, and Siuki (2021) said they would probably switch brands to support companies that make donations to nonprofit organisations. More recently, Rapert, Thyroff and Grace (2021) reported that many consumers are waiting for businesses to genuinely engage in CSR – more precisely, CRM. Thomas and Jadeja (2021) investigated the psychological origins of customer scepticism about advertising in CRM, discovering various mindsets associated with favourable or negative consumer views. Furthermore, several academics (e.g., Ferraris et al. 2020; Tsiros and Irmak 2020) found greater purchase intention for CRM-related products, especially when consumers thought the cause was important to them. Researchers have found that CRM programs positively affect consumers' intentions to make purchases (Fan et al. 2020; Duarte and Silva 2020). Thus, prior studies have demonstrated that CRM can affect the purchasing intentions and behaviours of customers (e.g., Srivastava 2020; Eker Iscioglu and Borak 2020; Dagyte-Kavoliune, Adomaviciute, and Urbonavicius 2021; Tao and Ji 2020). Several studies have shown that consumers are willing to pay more for products and services from companies that support the community (Carroll 2021a). Another study by Ferraris et al. (2020) supports the beneficial relationship between CRM and consumers' purchasing intention. Customers are more open to companies that engage in social responsibility programs like CRM campaigns, according to previous research (e.g., Baskentli et al. 2019). Partouche et al. (2020: 937) investigated the impact of CRM campaigns on the purchasing behaviour of French millennials and found that French millennials exposed to CRM advertising shared characteristics with their American and Dutch counterparts, including a favourable attitude towards the advertising and a high propensity to buy. In the current market context, customers are motivated to make impulsive purchases not only by the features of the brand's products or services but also by their perception of the brand's environmental impact as shown in its CRM practices (Hayat *et al.* 2020). Kim and Kim (2021) and Jubilee, Kasilingam, and Stephen (2023) discovered in their tests that an advertisement featuring a CRM message resulted in higher positive sentiments towards the organisation than those exposed to a message without a CRM.

## **2.8 Brand Equity**

The idea of BE began to take shape in the late 1980s and has since grown to be one of the most significant ideas in marketing (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993). BE is defined by Erdem and Swait (2023) as "the added value a given brand gives a product." They claim that BE makes it possible for a product to have premium pricing. According to Aaker (1991), brand equity is the collection of brand assets and liabilities associated with the brand, such as its name and symbols that either increase or decrease the value of a good or service. Aaker (1991), who also put forth a four-dimensional model that encompasses brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, was the first to recognise the relationship between consumer attitudes and BE.

BE is one of the ideas that brand management academics have been concentrating on lately (Pina and Dias 2021; Huerta-Álvarez, Cambra-Fierro and Fuentes-Blasco 2020; Xi and Hamari 2020). Presented by Aaker (1991), Del Barrio-García and Prados-Peña (2019), and Christodoulides, Cadogan and Veloutsou (2015), this is an essential subject in marketing. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of scientific agreement on its definition, scope, and measurement (Londoño, Elms and Davies 2016). There is a lack of agreement over how to best measure BE simply, which adds to the challenges already facing marketing professionals, particularly in terms of where to justifiably invest time and resources in brand- building endeavours (Christodoulides, Cadogan and Veloutsou 2015). The BE idea describes the value that a certain brand adds to a company's goods. Put differently, it refers to the distinct impact that brand awareness has on how customers react to the brand's marketing (Keller 1993: 2).

According to Hodson (2021) and Sasmita and Mohd Suki (2015), branding facilitates customer choice by acting as a product-differentiation aspect that supports decision-making based on the experiences and reliability associated with the brand in question. Brands with a high BE will have higher profit margins, communicate more effectively, and have a significant impact on customer preferences and buying intent (Gupta et al. 2021; De Canio, Martinelli, and Endrighi 2021). As a result, numerous studies have discovered that BE has a positive impact on future cash flow and profits, customer willingness to pay higher prices, share value, and the results of brand marketing initiatives, among other things (Verma 2021; Algharabat et al. 2020; Mahmood

and Bashir 2020; Gupta et al. 2020).

Businesses with a high BE level will be less adversely affected by unsuccessful attempts at innovation than organisations with a low BE level, demonstrating that BE is also known to reduce the risks associated with innovation (Liao and Cheng 2014). BE is also necessary for gaining a competitive edge and assessing brand performance. For example, it assists the business in extending the reach of a brand, creating barriers against new competitors, creating successful brand extensions, or strengthening a brand's resistance to promotions from competitors (Loken and John 2023; Sasmita and Mohd Suki 2015).

Previous research indicates that BE protects against innovation failures (Liao and Cheng 2014) and product-harm crises (e.g., Liu and Shankar 2015; Hsu and Lawrence 2016). According to Lassar, Mittal, and Sharma (1995: 13), brand equity is the increase in the perceived usefulness and desirability a brand name bestows on a product. Customers believe that products wearing that brand are often superior to those from other brands. Additionally, BE influences consumers' propensity to buy (Verma 2021).

Brand equity, a critical determinant of a company's long-term success, is shaped by consumer perceptions, corporate actions, and marketing strategies. The Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973) and Aaker's Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1991) provide complementary perspectives on how consumers evaluate brands, particularly in the context of CSR and CRM. Attribution Theory explains how consumers assess the underlying motives behind a brand's actions, particularly in CSR and CRM initiatives. Consumers engage in motivational attribution, categorising corporate behaviour as either: Intrinsic (driven by genuine concern for social good) or Extrinsic (driven by profit-seeking or reputation management) (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2021). Recent studies confirm that cause-brand fit and transparency heavily influence these attributions. When consumers perceive a logical alignment between a brand and its supported cause (e.g., Patagonia funding environmental conservation), they are more likely to attribute intrinsic motives, enhancing trust and brand equity (Gupta and Pirsch, 2021). Conversely, low-fit campaigns (e.g., a tobacco company promoting health initiatives) trigger scepticism, eroding brand value (Grolleau et al., 2022).

Additionally, corporate credibility moderates' attributional outcomes. Brands with a history of ethical behaviour benefit from a "halo effect," where consumers default to positive attributions (Alhouti et al., 2021). In contrast, firms with past controversies face heightened scepticism, even for well-intentioned campaigns (Lee et al., 2020). Recent research underscores that CRM's impact on these dimensions depends on attributional clarity. For example, Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2019) found that brands with transparent CRM strategies (e.g., disclosing donation amounts) strengthen perceived quality and loyalty, while opaque campaigns dilute equity. Similarly, Vlachos et al. (2022) demonstrated that intrinsic attributions enhance brand associations, whereas extrinsic attributions trigger consumer backlash.

Furthermore, Aaker's Brand Equity theory remains contextually relevant as it provides a foundational framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of brand equity, particularly through the lens of customer-based brand equity (CBBE). Aaker identifies key components such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand associations, which are essential for building strong brands that resonate with consumers (Swaminathan, 2016). Recent literature emphasizes the importance of integrating various perspectives on brand equity, highlighting the need for effective communication strategies to enhance brand recognition and trust (Hu and Zhang, 2023). Furthermore, dynamic models of brand equity illustrate how consumer perceptions and preferences evolve over time, suggesting that brand equity is not static but influenced by market conditions and consumer interactions (Phan et al., 2016). This comprehensive approach underscores the necessity for brands to adapt and manage their equity strategically to maintain relevance and competitive advantage in a rapidly changing marketplace (Barrio-García et al., 2023; Rao et al., 2023).

Brand loyalty has evolved with the rise of e-commerce and subscription-based models. Recent studies highlight that emotional engagement and value alignment are stronger predictors of loyalty than mere satisfaction (Rather, 2021). For example, brands like Apple and Nike cultivate loyalty not just through product quality but through brand communities and mission-driven marketing (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Aaker's emphasis on loyalty as a buffer against competition is particularly relevant in industries with low switching costs (e.g.,

streaming services). Research by Pansari and Kumar (2017) confirms that customer-centric CRM strategies (e.g., personalized rewards, cause-related marketing) enhance loyalty by fostering emotional connections.

## **2.9 Dimensions of Brand Equity and Consumer Purchasing Behaviour (Purchase Intention)**

The sections below discuss the four dimensions of BE and their respective influence on consumer purchasing behaviour (purchase intention).

### **2.9.1 Brand Quality or Perceived Quality**

Perceived quality refers to how consumers believe a brand provides high-quality items (Akoglu and Özbek 2022). The concept benefits a brand in a variety of ways. It is the major motivator for product or service purchases, helps with brand extensions, and persuades clients to pay more for a good or service (Kataria and Saini 2020). Customers will choose a brand over rivals if they believe it to be of higher quality (Pina and Dias 2021). According to Akoglu and Özbek (2022), perceived quality refers to consumers' perceptions of a product or service's overall quality.

Brand value includes perceived quality (Coelho, Bairrada, and de Matos Coelho 2020). Aaker (1991) and Keller (2003) define perceived quality in the context of branding as the consumer's assessment of the overall quality or superiority of a good or service concerning its intended use, as well as the general perception of the brand. Customers' assessments, which are created by comparing expectations with the impression of actual service performance, are linked to perceived quality (Marimon, Mas-Machuca and Berbegal- Mirabent 2020; Biscaia, Yoshida and Kim 2023). Perceived high quality can boost brand preference (Khenfer and Cuny 2020) and encourage customers to choose a particular brand over rivals (Khenfer and Cuny 2020).

Businesses that offer high-quality services have a competitive advantage and are probably more lucrative (Çağlıyan, Attar and Abdul-Kareem 2022). Furthermore, because perceived brand quality and brand attitude are positively correlated (Xi and Hamari 2020), consumers are often motivated to purchase specific items because of the perceived brand quality, which sets the product apart from competitors (Nasiri and Shokouhyar 2021). According to Wang, Tao and

Chu (2020), behavioural intention and perceived quality are positively correlated.

### **2.9.2 Brand Association**

According to Pina and Dias (2021), brand association is defined as anything that is associated with a brand in memory. Several brand links come together to form a brand's image (Obilo, Chefor, and Saleh 2021). Furthermore, brand associations define the extent to which customers feel connected to the brand. Additionally, higher degrees of association reflect stronger ties between consumers and brands (Hinsch, Felix, and Rauschnabel 2020). Previous research has separated brand connections into three categories: organisational associations, perceived value, and brand personality (Coelho, Bairrada and de Matos Coelho 2020; Roggeveen *et al.* 2021; Lee and Hsieh 2022). Consumer perception of a product's cost-effectiveness can be used to explain perceived value (Chae *et al.* 2020). Customers can more easily determine whether a product is worth its price through a CRM campaign. According to Arora *et al.* (2021), brand personality refers to how well a brand fits the personality of the consumer. Customers can determine whether a specific brand or product is appropriate for their requirements or personality through CRM campaigns.

The consumer view of a product's producer is known as an organisational association (Lim *et al.* 2022). CRM campaign evaluations help customers learn about the distinctive qualities of the product's maker, with whom they might establish a connection. Gómez-Rico *et al.* (2023) asserts that "brand association" and "brand image" are synonymous terms. Ideas like "brand association" help consumers associate the name of a specific brand with their recollections (Pina and Dias 2021; Huaman-Ramirez *et al.* 2021).

Customers frequently base their purchasing decisions on how they perceive the brand image of a company (Pina and Dias 2021). Customers' willingness to pay higher costs is positively correlated with having a strong brand image (González-Rodríguez, Díaz-Fernández and Font 2020; Keller 1993). By defining the brand and its value and securing a particular place in consumers' perceptions, a distinctive brand image aids in the development of prospective BE improvement (Parris and Guzmán 2023). Positive brand perception leads consumers to associate a brand with advantages and high standards of quality (Gupta *et al.* 2020).

### **2.9.3 Brand Loyalty**

"The attachment that a consumer has to a brand" is defined as brand loyalty (Aaker 1991: 39). Costa Filho, Falcao, and Motta (2021) describe brand loyalty as an attitude towards a brand expressed by behaviours and intentions to suggest and re-patronise. The potential for a customer to switch brands is reflected in brand loyalty (Atulkar 2020). One of the most crucial marketing strategies is word-of-mouth advertising or recommendations (Hanaysha 2021). As a result, attitudinal and behavioural loyalty two distinct conceptions of loyalty are discussed in the literature (Dandis and Al Haj Eid 2022). As stated by Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh (2020) and Diallo, Moulins, and Roux (2021), attitude loyalty is focused on psychological attitudes towards the brand, such as commitment or distinctiveness, whereas behavioural loyalty is focused on repeating actual purchase behaviour.

Dedicated clients believe the brand is relevant to their values and way of life and trust it. According to Khan and DePaoli (2024), consumers who are willing to invest more in a brand than they would have when they first bought or consumed it are the strongest indicators of brand loyalty. In other words, consumers become involved with a brand when they invest time, effort, money, or other resources in it, such as by visiting the company's website, following brand news, or taking part in pertinent chat rooms (Zhang, Prayag, and Song 2021). The degree of a consumer's behavioural, emotional, and mental investment in certain brand relationships is known as customer brand engagement. (Cheung and others, 2021). The brand engagement has received a lot of attention in the branding literature because of its substantial effects on customer loyalty, word-of-mouth, brand involvement, the development of strong brand relationships, and enhanced customer perceptions of price (Kaur et al. 2020; Acharya 2021; Santos et al. 2022b).

Numerous research indicates a link between brand loyalty and consumer responses. Customers who are loyal to a brand are willing to spend more for it, according to Dörnyei (2020). Increased brand loyalty can improve brand performance and sales-related outcomes (Ratnawati, Hastuti, and Kholis 2022). Leiria, Rebelo, and de Matos (2022) found a favourable correlation between brand loyalty and customer behaviour when compared to consumers who are not loyal or who

transfer brands. According to Dapena-Baron, Gruen, and Guo (2020), loyal consumers are more likely to purchase their favourite brand and are less inclined to switch brands. Positive experiences in the past combine to create affective loyalty, which in turn can influence a customer's attitude towards a company (Joshi and Garg, 2021). Affective loyalty is favourably correlated with opinions regarding cobranded items (Paydas Turan 2021). According to Chatterjee and Basu (2023), brand loyalty is the desire to buy a specific brand as one's preferred option and the brand's attitudinal preference. Strong brand loyalty can, therefore, boost purchase intent and promote a favourable brand perception.

#### **2.9.4 Brand Awareness**

Customers' capacity to identify and remember a brand in various contexts is known as brand awareness (Pina and Dias 2021; Aaker 1991). Brand recognition refers to customers' capacity to recognise previous brand exposure when presented with the brand as a cue. (Bergkvist and Taylor 2022). Brand recall refers to consumers' ability to recall a brand name from their memories (Davtyan, Cunningham and Tashchian 2021). According to Vredenburg *et al.* (2020), well-known brands outperform less well-known businesses in the marketplace because of brand awareness. CRM makes it easier for customers to learn about brands.

Brand awareness is the capacity of consumers to recognise, recall, or be cognisant of a brand (Makrides, Vrontis, and Christofi 2020; Pina and Dias 2021). Brand awareness affects consumer decision-making, and consumers are more likely to consider and buy from well-known brands (Xu et al. 2022; Rahman et al. 2021). Customers with brand awareness make initial selections faster than consumers without it (Marques *et al.* 2020), even though brand awareness is not an important dimension of BE (Algharabat *et al.* 2020; Veloutsou, Chatzipanagiotou and Christodoulides 2020). A strong brand has a positive effect and is more likely to encourage customers to buy (Dabbous and Barakat 2020; Rahman et al. 2021). According to the perspective of information processing, brand awareness increases the accessibility of information and familiar information is more important when making decisions, which results in a more favourable evaluation of a brand (Schwarz et al. 2021; Fu et al. 2020).

Mehta and Tariq (2020) found that brand awareness positively impacts brand choice and

market share, while also increasing customer retention rates and profit margins (Marques et al. 2020). Brand awareness, which influences customers to consider a brand before making a purchase and cultivates a favourable brand perception and strong purchase intention, is a sign of brand commitment (Zhou et al. 2021; Guha, Mandal, and Kujur 2021).

This study views brand equity as a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses several key variables, including brand quality, brand association, brand loyalty, and brand awareness, each contributing uniquely to the overall brand value. Brand quality, often referred to as perceived quality, is a critical determinant of brand equity, as evidenced by its strong positive correlation with brand equity in various sectors, such as amateur sports clubs and the toy industry, where it emerged as a significant factor influencing consumer perceptions and brand capital (Bańbuła, 2024; Hoo et al., 2024). Brand association, which involves the mental connections consumers make with a brand, plays a vital role in shaping brand equity by influencing consumer perceptions and experiences, although its impact can vary across different contexts (Suprihhadi et al., 2024; Hoo et al., 2024). Brand loyalty, the degree of consumer commitment and repeat purchase behavior, is consistently highlighted as a pivotal component of brand equity, mediating the effects of other dimensions like brand association and perceived quality, thereby enhancing overall brand strength (Suprihhadi et al., 2024; Suwiryono and Aryandha, 2024). Brand awareness, the extent to which consumers recognize and recall a brand, serves as the foundational step in building brand equity, facilitating the development of a positive brand image and fostering consumer engagement and loyalty, although its impact may be less pronounced compared to other dimensions (Bańbuła, 2024) (Hoo et al., 2024). Together, these dimensions form a comprehensive framework for understanding and managing brand equity, allowing organizations across various industries, from smartphones to airlines, to strategically enhance their brand value and consumer relationships (Suwiryono and Aryandha, 2024; Rodríguez and Forero, 2024).

## **2.10 The Concept of Consumer Scepticism**

Authors including Mimouni Chaabane and Parguel (2016), Deb, Sharma, and Amawate (2021), Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017), Mendini, Peter, and Gibbert (2018), Priporas et al. (2020), Rahman, Park, and Chi (2015), and Yin, Du, and Chen (2020) have produced a wide range of

studies on CRM scepticism. The Greek term "sceptical," which means "to consider and reflect," is where the word "scepticism" originates, according to Leonidou and Skarmas (2017). Consumer scepticism has been roughly characterised as the propensity for customers to distrust or not believe marketers (Foreh and Grier 2003).

Scepticism is defined as a person's inclination towards mistrust or disbelief. Few consumer studies (e.g., Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998; Baghramian and Caprioglio Panizza 2022) portray scepticism as a personality trait; however, most studies, particularly in the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Chon and Kim 2021; Ham and Kim 2020), concentrate on situational scepticism, which is a result of mistrust of the information that businesses provide and is unrelated to an individual's characteristics (Lins et al. 2024). Customers attribute CRM motives in two ways: intrinsically, when they think the company is acting out of a sincere concern for the social issue, and extrinsically, when they think, the company is attempting to boost its profits (Araujo et al. 2020; Chan 2023; Chandra et al. 2022).

Customers respond more favourably when they attribute stronger intrinsic incentives; conversely, when they perceive extrinsic motives as predominating, they respond less favourably (Ahn and Dias Soeiro 2022) According to one line of research, customers' growing mistrust of businesses' CRM attempts may be impeding their motivation to disseminate positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Chu, Kim and Kim 2023).

According to Joireman, Liu and Kareklas (2018), scepticism about CRM can be a reflection of how customers feel about that type of CSR. Although the relationship between CRM and the CSR umbrella, it is important to recognise the three types of CSR scepticism: CSR scepticism, CRM scepticism, and green scepticism. There has been a lot of interest in the phenomenon of scepticism about CSR initiatives (Musgrove, Choi, and Cox 2018). According to Agarwal and Kumar, (2021), Scepticism is often linked to green advertising and the authenticity of environmentally friendly initiatives

#### Types and Levels of Consumer Scepticism

Prior research has classified people's scepticism into two categories: situational persuasion knowledge and dispositional persuasion knowledge (Borchers 2022; Ham et al. 2022). The sum of consumers' exposure to, experience with, and knowledge of persuasion and advertising is

known as dispositional persuasion knowledge, whereas the assessments and actions they take when they recognise a persuasive communication or advertisement are known as situational persuasion knowledge. (Yang, Jiang and Wu 2021).

According to Nguyen *et al.* (2023) and Zhang and Hanks (2017), situational scepticism holds that people's perceptions can be impacted by the context or quantity of information they are presented with. On the other hand, a person's persistent propensity to doubt the motivations of others outside of context is known as pre-dispositional scepticism (Foreh and Grier 2003). Most studies on CSR scepticism consider scepticism to be a temporary state (Albayrak, Aksoy and Caber 2013; Bartels *et al.* 2020; Deb, 2021; Foreh and Grier 2003; Goh and Balaji 2016; Kim and Lee 2015; Mohr, Eroglu and Ellen 1998; Singh, Kristensen and Villaseñor 2009; Zhang and Hanks 2017). However, some scholars call scepticism "dispositional scepticism" (De Vries *et al.* 2015; Dhanesh and Nekmat 2019; Ham and Kim 2020; Joireman, Liu and Kareklas 2018; Kim, White Kim 2019; Manuel, Youn and Yoon 2014) and characterise it as a person's enduring tendency to reject (Foreh and Grier 2003).

In addition, some writers argue that dispositional scepticism's effects have not been sufficiently discussed about corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Deb Sharma and Amawate 2021; Kim, Youn and Lee 2019; Yin, Du and Chen 2020; Zhang and Hanks 2017). Numerous research has found that customers are not always equally suspicious (De Vries *et al.* 2015; Pandey *et al.* 2020; Silva *et al.* 2020). Research has long demonstrated that, in the context of businesses' CSR activities, consumers' dispositional scepticism has a major impact on how they respond to CSR marketing messages (Ham and Kim 2020; Lee *et al.* 2019). In particular, there is a risk that a brand's CSR initiative will fall flat with highly sceptical customers.

Stated differently, customers who exhibit high levels of scepticism (as opposed to low levels) are inclined to contest and inquire about the reasons behind a company's CSR endeavours, viewing them as less genuine and more focused on the company's interests (Yoon, Gürhan-Canli and Schwarz 2006). Obermiller, Spangenberg and MacLachlan (2005) show that people's scepticism influences how they interpret advertisements and brand beliefs. Customers who exhibit excessive levels of scepticism, in particular, respond less favourably to the brand

message, which makes them more wary of that type of advertising. Studies have shown that scepticism varies by country (Pandey et al. 2020; Silva et al. 2020). Additionally, scepticism varies across cultural contexts (Kim Youn and Lee 2019) and is associated with lower degrees of collectivism (Amawate and Deb, 2021; Chang and Cheng 2015).

In the same cultural and national environment, different consumer groups are unequally suspicious, contradicting the notion that collectivist people would be less so (Amawate and Deb 2021; Thomas and Kureshi 2020; Yu 2020). For example, notwithstanding cultural differences, Indian customers are less trusting of CRM efforts since they have been exposed to CRM more than Filipino consumers (Pandey et al. 2020). This conclusion is consistent with research on the degree of green scepticism among Portuguese and Brazilian consumers (Lemke and Luzio 2014). Despite the social similarities between Brazil and Portugal, Lemke and Luzio (2014) have shown in one of the few cross-country context studies how Brazilian and Portuguese consumers communicated their scepticism differently. It is crucial to remember that different countries have different definitions of "green scepticism" (Silva et al. 2020).

Consumer scepticism has emerged as a critical barrier to effective marketing communications, particularly in CRM, CSR, and sustainability initiatives. Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973) provides a robust framework for understanding how consumers interpret corporate motives, shaping their scepticism or trust. In line with the attribution theory, internal (Dispositional) Attributions and external attributions determine whether consumers view a brand's actions as authentic or opportunistic, directly influencing scepticism (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2021). Consumers evaluate CRM campaigns based on the perceived fit between the brand and the cause. High-fit initiatives are more likely to be attributed to intrinsic motives, reducing scepticism (Gupta and Pirsch, 2021). Conversely, low-fit campaigns trigger attributional ambiguity, increasing scepticism (Grolleau et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Lee et al. (2020) found that transparency in CRM reduces scepticism by fostering internal attributions. Hajjat (2020) demonstrated that incongruent cause-brand pairings lead to higher scepticism, as consumers question ulterior motives. Consumers rely on prior brand reputation to make attributions. Firms with a history of ethical behaviour benefit from a halo

effect, where CSR efforts are more likely to be seen as genuine (Alhouti et al., 2021). In contrast, companies with past scandals face attributional scepticism, where even well-intentioned actions are viewed as image repair tactics (Vlachos et al., 2022).

Additionally, in an era marked by growing consumer distrust and corporate scrutiny, Aaker's Brand Equity Theory (1991) provides a robust framework for understanding and addressing consumer scepticism. The theory's five dimensions brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets offer critical insights into how brands can build credibility and mitigate scepticism in their marketing initiatives, particularly in socially conscious campaigns. The loyalty dimension of brand equity serves as a powerful counterbalance to consumer scepticism. As demonstrated by recent research, established brand relationships create an "emotional bank account" that brands can draw upon when introducing new initiatives (Gupta and Pirsch, 2021). Habel et al. (2020) submit that loyal customers exhibit confirmation bias, interpreting ambiguous information in ways that confirm their positive brand beliefs. Again, high loyalty correlates with lower scepticism thresholds, requiring less evidence to accept CSR claims (Rather, 2021)

### **2.10.1 Consequences of CRM Scepticism (Negative Effects)**

Those who are sceptical of CRM could search for indications that a business's CRM initiatives are genuine and driven by charity (Chatzopoulou and de Kiewiet 2021). One of the main topics of discussion in the research is how CRM scepticism affects consumer-related outcomes. Consumer scepticism is known to negatively impact consumer-related outcomes. Negative attitudes (Yin, Du, and Chen 2020), negative sentiments towards businesses (Priporas et al. 2020), a negative influence on support intentions (Amawate and Deb 2021; Mantovani, de Andrade and Negrão 2017; Moreno and Kang 2020), purchase intentions (Elving 2013; Leonidou and Skarmeas 2017; Shazly and Mahrous 2020), participation and revisit intentions (Rahman, Park, and Chi 2015), product consumption (Golob et al. 2018), and perceived tax behaviour (Toder-Alon, Rosenstreich, and Harari 2019) are examples of less favourable responses to CRM initiatives (Romani, Grappi, and Bagozzi 2016).

Additionally, consumer scepticism can weaken resilience to negative brand information and threaten consumer-based BE (Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013; Skarmeas, Leonidou, and

Saridakis 2014). Additionally, it may encourage unfavourable word-of-mouth (Leonidou and Skarmeas 2017) or damage electronic word-of-mouth (Bartels et al. 2020). Consumers may be wary of CRM marketing, and research has indicated that this mistrust affects both their inclination to make purchases (Chang and Cheng 2015) and their perceptions of organisations (Chung 2018).

Furthermore, clients can question a business's dedication to CRM. Customer evaluations (Lee 2020), attitudes towards the company and purchase intentions (Elving 2013), perceptions of CRM activities and support intentions (Kim and Lee 2015), perceptions of price fairness (Fennell, Coleman, and Kuo 2020), perceived corporate credibility (Bae 2018; Lee et al. 2019; Orazi and Chan 2020), and customers' inclination for pro-social behaviour (Mantovani, de Andrade, and Negrão 2017) can all be negatively impacted by this mistrust. Thus, customers are likely to view a firm more favourably when they are less sceptical of its CRM efforts (Arli *et al.* 2019). Customers who doubt a company's commitment to CSR often react negatively (Fennell, Coleman and Kuo 2020; Webb and Mohr 1998).

### **2.10.2 Consequences of CRM Scepticism (Non-Negative Effects)**

However, other research suggests that scepticism on the part of consumers does not always have a detrimental impact on their responses. For instance, CRM involvement or activities can be rated favourably overall with no decrease in perceived business credibility (Alam, Karim and Habiba 2021; Handa and Gupta 2020) even though they are thought to be self-serving. Additionally, a study examining the fast-moving consumer products market revealed that Indian customers were neutral in their scepticism, which resulted in favourable CRM reviews (Sen Gupta and Wadera 2021). It is possible that consumer scepticism is not as harmful as it first appears because there is a difference between consumer behaviour and scepticism.

According to the study, there is no detrimental effect of green practice scepticism on the behavioural intentions of hotel guests, such as their intent to make a purchase, return, or recommend the hotel to others (Kim and Roseman 2020). It is worth noting that among French customers, green scepticism can lead to more comprehensive green claims and positive intents for green consumption (Silva et al. 2020). The existing collection of research on green scepticism produces contradicting findings concerning how green scepticism influences future

consumer behaviours, such as information-seeking behaviour (Goh and Balaji 2016; Leonidou and Skarmeas 2017). Research indicates that although green scepticism has been associated with negative outcomes, these effects may not directly affect patronage or intentions to make green purchases (Goh and Balaji 2016; Luo et al. 2020; Amawate and Deb 2021). According to Amawate and Deb (2021), patronage intentions among younger Indian consumers do not seem to be directly impacted by scepticism. Moreover, Kintu and Ben-Slimane (2020) show that customers are supportive and want to buy sponsored products even in the face of the company's alleged bad intentions.

The literature generally emphasises how favourably customers view CRM. Overall, the inconsistent findings regarding the impact of consumer scepticism of CRM on consumer-related outcomes add to the growing corpus of research on this subject and the debate over the appropriateness of communicating CRM programs. However, cynicism among consumers has more negative impacts than favourable ones, even though some researchers have shown otherwise. Consumers have been the focus of the majority of studies on how scepticism affects them.

### **2.10.3 Scepticism and Consumers' Response Towards Cause-Related Marketing Campaigns and Subsequent Purchase Behaviour (Purchase Intentions)**

The landscape of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has evolved significantly, with customers becoming increasingly sceptical about the motivations behind businesses' CRM initiatives. This scepticism is largely driven by a growing awareness of the potential financial benefits that companies can derive from their CRM activities (Dang, Nguyen, and Wang 2020; Lagomarsino and Lemarié 2022). Attribution theory, which suggests that individuals assess the motivations behind others' actions when evaluating behaviour (Heider 1958), provides a framework for understanding the relationship between CRM initiatives and customer feedback. Customers' perceptions of a company's motives significantly influence their reactions to CRM efforts, with negative responses often arising from perceived coercive or self-serving motivations (Christofi et al. 2020b; Twyman et al. 2023).

Research indicates that the mere existence of CRM initiatives does not guarantee positive customer reactions. Instead, customers' trust in a company's motives plays a critical role in shaping their responses. For instance, when companies engage in social causes unrelated to their core business, customers may lose faith in their CRM efforts (Bigné, Ruiz-Mafé and Badenes-Rocha 2023; Badenes-Rocha, Bigné and Ruiz 2022). The concept of "CRM fit" has been proposed to describe the alignment between an organization's core business and its social responsibility commitments (Dasgupta et al. 2022).

Scepticism towards CRM initiatives is particularly pronounced among consumers, leading to confusion in their purchasing decisions (Heidarian 2019). Ringold (2022) notes that inherent cynicism makes customers doubtful of advertisements, with CRM practices being more

advanced in American and European markets compared to Asia, where trust is still developing (Kureshi and Thomas 2020; Sen Gupta and Wadera 2021). Differences in psychological engagement and attitudes towards charitable donations have also been observed (Kumar and Chakrabarti 2023).

Trust is identified as a key factor influencing charitable giving behavior, as it reduces uncertainty and fosters long-term relationships (Yu et al. 2021; Hou, Zhang and King 2017). Companies are encouraged to understand the drivers of consumer donation intentions to effectively engage them in CRM campaigns (Hartmann, Klink and Simons 2015; Thomas and Jadeja 2021). Numerous studies have demonstrated that scepticism negatively impacts consumers' motivation to purchase, diminishing brand equity and increasing vulnerability to negative information (Choi et al. 2023).

The implications of varying levels of scepticism reveal that more sceptical customers tend to attribute negative motives to CRM activities and respond less favorably to CRM communications (Hüttl-Maack, Sedghi and Daume 2024; Weber et al. 2023). Conversely, customers with lower scepticism are more likely to view CRM efforts positively (Ratnakaran and Edward 2019; Schamp et al. 2023). The relationship between scepticism and consumer behaviour is complex, with some studies indicating that high scepticism can lead to a more abstract processing of information, while others suggest a focus on specific details (Bae 2020; Connors, Anderson-MacDonald and Thomson 2017).

Overall, the interplay between scepticism and consumer behaviour in the context of CRM is multifaceted. High levels of scepticism can diminish positive feelings associated with CRM initiatives and negatively impact purchasing decisions (Mimouni Chaabane and Parguel 2016; Priporas et al. 2020). As businesses navigate this landscape, understanding the nuances of consumer scepticism and its effects on CRM effectiveness will be crucial for fostering positive customer relationships and enhancing the impact of their social responsibility efforts.

## **2.11. Consumer Purchasing Behaviour (Purchase Intention) and Cause-Related Marketing**

Purchase intention serves as a crucial metric for predicting actual consumer behaviour in cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns. Defined as a consumer's likelihood to purchase a specific

product or service (Peña-García et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021), purchase intention represents the behavioral outcome of brand equity dimensions in CRM contexts (Dinh et al., 2023; Vuong and Bui, 2023). This metric has been extensively studied as a predictor of future purchases, with particular relevance to CRM initiatives where consumer motivation often combines product evaluation with social cause considerations (Ho Nguyen et al., 2022).

CRM fundamentally transforms purchase intention dynamics by adding a philanthropic dimension to consumer decision-making. Research demonstrates that CRM significantly influences purchase intentions when the supported cause resonates personally with consumers (Terblanche et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2021; Schamp et al., 2023). This effect stems from the dual psychological rewards of CRM participation - the "warm glow" of moral satisfaction combined with tangible support for a social cause (Chaabouni et al., 2021). These emotional drivers help explain why CRM consistently shows positive correlations with patronage intentions, defined as consumers' preference for businesses supporting social causes (Abu Zayyad et al., 2021; Deb Sharma and Amawate, 2021).

The CRM-purchase intention relationship operates through several mechanisms including social alignment, crises resilience and brand differentiation. For instance, while consumers increasingly prefer brands that demonstrate social responsibility (Kim and Austin, 2020; Suryavanshi et al., 2023), CRM helps brands stand out in competitive markets (Christofi et al., 2020b; Wu and Wang, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated CRM's power to maintain consumer connections during disruptions (Brydges et al., 2020; Akter et al., 2021). However, contemporary research identifies growing consumer scepticism as a moderating factor in the CRM-purchase intention relationship (Thomas Bhatt and Patel, 2022). This scepticism requires marketers to design CRM campaigns with clear cause-brand alignment, transparent impact reporting and authentic long-term commitment.

When executed effectively, CRM not only boosts immediate purchase intentions but also builds long-term customer engagement and loyalty (Singh and Pathak, 2020; Badenes-Rocha et al., 2022). The strongest CRM campaigns create virtuous cycles where purchase decisions reinforce social impact, which in turn strengthens brand reputation and future purchase

intentions (Kim Youn and Lee, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). For marketers, these findings underscore CRM's dual value as both a driver of immediate sales and a builder of sustainable brand equity. The challenge lies in balancing profit motives with genuine social impact - when this balance is achieved, CRM becomes one of the most powerful tools for aligning business objectives with consumer values in ways that drive measurable purchase behavior.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

This chapter examined the numerous definitions and viewpoints on the concept of CRM, the origin of CRM, the relationship between CSR and CRM, and the benefits and effects of cause campaigns on consumer purchasing behaviour. It also discussed and examined the meaning and dimensions of BE and how these influence consumers purchasing behaviour (purchase intention). It further examined in detail the concept of scepticism and its influence on consumers' response towards CRM campaigns and subsequent purchase intentions and ultimately explored consumer purchasing behaviour in detail and how CRM influences it.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEORETICAL REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter analysed the literature on the study's variables, such as the advantages and consequences of cause campaigns on customer purchasing behaviour, the relationship between CRM and CSR, and the definitions of CRM and CSR. Additionally reviewed were BE, the idea of scepticism, and consumer purchasing patterns. This thesis chapter covers the conceptual foundation of the thesis as well as the theoretical review of the notions used (CRM, BE, consumer purchasing behaviour, and consumer scepticism). The offered hypotheses test the factors under investigation. The contextualisation of the theories below requires more application to the study at hand in terms of its relevance and application.

#### **3.2 Attribution theory**

This theory offers a conceptual framework for investigating consumer attributions regarding CRM and aims to clarify how these attributions affect consumers' reactions to CRM (Fan et al. 2020). It claims that consumer attributions to a product are influenced by opinions about the company, brand, and industry. In the event of positive motivation, attribution leads to purchase intention, and prior brand experiences influence the assessment of the associated marketing effort. According to Chakraborty and Bhat (2017), attribution theory is a theory that explains the mental processes by which humans ascertain the reasons behind the actions and occurrences in their environment. Attribution theory states that a person's overall behaviour tries to provide context for the things around them (Zhang, Prayag, and Song 2021; Graham 2020). To make a causal judgement about brands, consumers compile a variety of brand-related reviews (attributes), which has an impact on the brands' overall value (BE) (Chakraborty and Bhat 2017; Bandyopadhyay et al. 2024; Veloutsou, Chatzipanagiotou, and Christodoulides 2020).

Attribution theory, rooted in social psychology, examines how individuals interpret and explain the causes of events and behaviours. The theory explores the cognitive processes behind

attributions, including why people attribute outcomes to certain factors (Saleh 2023; Heider 1958). Later extensions include attributes such as cause and effect relations in the theory (Malle 2022; Kelley 1973). The notion states that a person's objective and subjective characteristics frame their inventiveness and are the source of their creativity. Attribution theory, which is grounded in social psychology, investigates the cognitive processes that underpin the attribution process. When people encounter events or behaviours, they naturally make causal attributions to make sense of them.

While the objective part of human thinking forms the basis for creativity and novelty, this assumption, according to the theory, is contingent on the assessment of the normative conditions (El Maouch *et al.* 2023; Cayirdag 2011). The theory describes the tendency to overemphasise internal characteristics (personality, disposition) and underestimate external factors when explaining others' behaviour (Martinko and Mackey 2019). Thus, people's attributions for success or failure influence their motivation and future behaviour. If individuals attribute success to internal factors (skill, effort), they may be motivated to repeat the behaviour (Kuhl 2021; Myers 2010).

Conversely, attributing failure to external factors can protect self-esteem (Ibrahim, Göddertz and Herzberg 2023; Kelley 1973). These attributions, which might be situational (external) or dispositional (internal), can significantly affect a person's feelings, attitudes, and conduct in the future (Liu, Sulaiman and Shahimi 2023; Pardo and Alfonso 2017). Snead *et al.* (2015), and Graham and Taylor (2022) also put forward three main factors of the attribution theory: locus of control (internal vs. external), stability (whether the cause is temporary or enduring), and controllability (whether the cause is within one's control). People's motivation and self-esteem are heavily influenced by how they attribute causes to positive and negative events. For example, attributing success to personal effort rather than task difficulty or external factors can result in increased self-esteem and self-efficacy. In contrast, consistently attributing failures to personal flaws can lead to low self-esteem and feelings of helplessness (Martinko and Mackey 2019).

The theory has been applied in several fields including social psychology (Zhou and Ki 2018;

Martinko and Mackey 2019; Spilka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick 2019; Graham 2020), education (Fishman and Husman 2017; Xie *et al.* 2022; Gutierrez-Serrano, Romo and Chagolla 2023), health (Mogavero and Hsu 2018; Muschetto and Siegel 2019; Yao and Siegel 2021), marketing, entrepreneurship, and tourism (Pardo and Alfonso 2017; Berman 2018; Chakraborty 2019; Jackson 2019; Su, Lian and Huang 2020) and information systems (Snead *et al.* 2015; Sharma 2022).

### 3.2.1 Conceptual Model of Attribution Theory

Figure 3.1 is a conceptual model illustrating the process of how individuals form attributions (causal explanations) for outcomes and the subsequent emotional, psychological, and behavioural consequences. This model is particularly germane in the context of CRM, where consumers' perceptions and attributions about the cause and the company's involvement can significantly influence their responses.

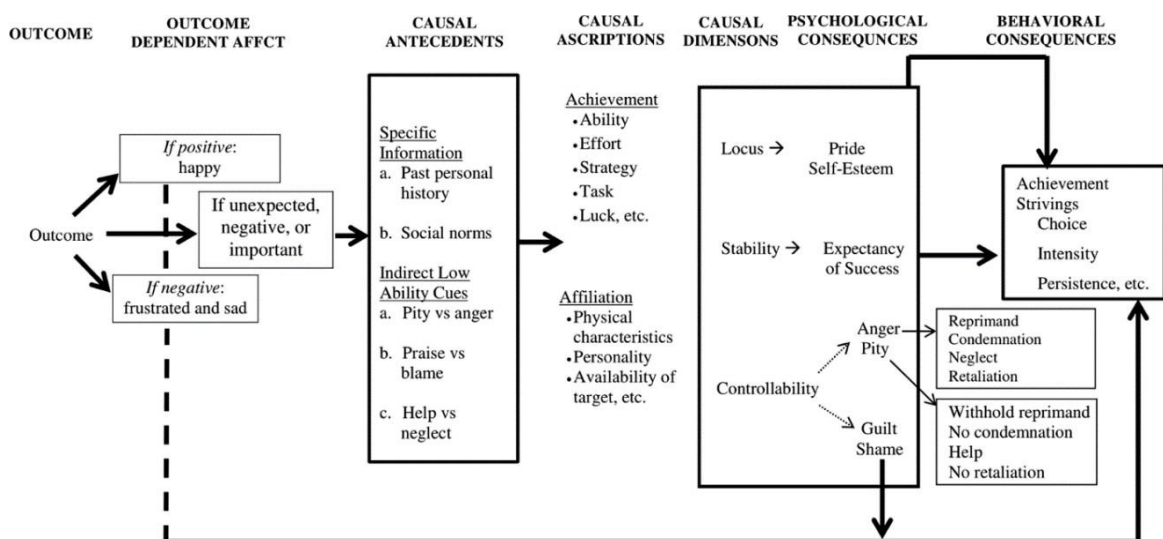


Figure 3.1: Attribution theory of motivation

Source: Graham (2020)

#### 3.2.1.1 Breakdown of Figure 3.1

##### 1. Outcome:

- The initial event or result that the consumer experiences. In CRM, this could be the customer's perception of the corporation's participation in a social cause.

- Outcomes can be either **positive** (leading to happiness) or **negative** (leading to frustration and sadness). The unexpectedness, negativity, or importance of the outcome can activate a deeper cognitive processing.

## 2. Causal antecedents:

- This stage involves gathering specific information to form an attribution.
- **Specific information:** Consumers may refer to past personal history or social norms to evaluate the company's involvement.
- **Indirect low ability cues:** These are signals like praise vs. blame or help vs. neglect that influence how the consumer perceives the company's capability and intent.

## 3. Causal ascriptions:

- The attributions formed can be related to **achievement** (ability, effort, strategy, luck, etc.) or **affiliation** (personality, physical characteristics, availability, etc.).
- For CRM, this could involve consumers assessing whether the company's involvement in the cause is genuine (affiliation) or competent (achievement).

## 4. Psychological dimensions:

- **Locus:** Internal vs. external control; influences pride and self-esteem. If consumers feel the company's actions stem from internal motivation, they might feel pride in supporting the company.
- **Stability:** The consistency of the cause and the company's involvement influences the chances of success.
- **Controllability:** Determines whether the consumer perceives the company as having control over the outcome. This can lead to emotions like anger, pity, guilt, or shame.

## 5. Behavioural consequences:

- Depending on the psychological consequences, consumers might show varying levels of behaviour (such as intention to support the cause, persistence in supporting the company, etc.).

- The behavioural outcomes could include actions like retaliating or not against the company, withholding or giving help, or supporting the cause-related initiative more intensely.

### 3.2.1.2 Application to Cause-Related Marketing

In CRM, companies tie their products or services to social causes, intending to influence consumers' purchasing behaviour. The effectiveness of such campaigns heavily depends on how consumers perceive the company's involvement.

- **Positive outcome:** If customers believe the company's involvement is genuine and beneficial, they may experience pleasant emotions (happy), leading to increased loyalty, higher purchase intention, and stronger support for the cause.
- **Negative outcome:** Conversely, if the involvement is seen as insincere or exploitative, it can lead to negative emotions (frustration and sadness), resulting in a backlash against the company.
- **Attribution process:** Consumers will evaluate the cause's involvement based on specific information and cues. If they attribute the company's involvement to internal motivations (e.g., genuine care for the cause) and perceive it as stable and controllable, it can enhance their pride and willingness to support the company. However, if the involvement seems external (e.g., purely profit-driven) or unstable, it might lead to scepticism and reduced support.

In conclusion, CRM is a delicate balance in which consumer attributions are critical to the success or failures of such operations. Figure 3.1 helps illustrate the complex psychological and behavioural processes that underlie consumer responses to these campaigns. Attribution theory is highly relevant to marketing and consumer behaviour as it helps understand how individuals interpret events and make attributions about them. According to Jackson (2019), the theory helps investigate the quality-of-service delivery in the marketing and tourism industry. Customers also assign situational or intrinsic factors the product or service's fundamental qualities—to their past experiences with it. Thus, marketers can influence these attributions through product design, branding, and messaging (Berman 2018). Berman's (2018) study, for instance, investigated how online advertisement influences consumers purchasing behaviour. The results of the study imply that a consumer's preferences in making purchases are influenced

by their attitudes, beliefs, and objectives.

Thus, while marketers attribute the success of advertising campaigns to consumer loyalty, consumers may attribute positive outcomes to the quality of the ad (internal factors) or external factors like the product's reputation (Mu and Zhang 2021). Understanding these attributions helps marketers design more effective advertising strategies. Using attribution theory to understand the reasons behind customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, marketers can identify whether customers attribute their experiences to the company's service quality (internal) or external factors and can address issues effectively and improve overall customer satisfaction (Sann *et al.* 2023; Chiu *et al.* 2012).

### **3.3 Aaker's Brand Equity Model**

BE is an important marketing concern. Although this idea has received a lot of attention, there is disagreement on how to measure this intricate and multidimensional structure (Chatzipanagiotou, Christodoulides, and Veloutsou 2019). Aaker has presented one of the most comprehensive and well-recognised definitions of BE: A collection of brand-related skills and resources that enhance or diminish the value that a product or service offers to the business (Rangaswamy *et al.* 2020; Aaker 1991). Therefore, BE is a multifaceted concept with dimensions such as brand association, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other assets that are taken into account in the first four dimensions of the consumer-based BE analysis. Figure 3.2 portrays the four dimensions of BE which were used in the study to determine the mediating role of BE.

A useful resource for comprehending the significance and administration of BE is Aaker's BE model (Shalan *et al.* 2022; Aaker 1992). It emphasises the long-term investment in building BE, which is crucial for customer loyalty and profitability. A strategic instrument for managing and evaluating brand perception and value is the model. Once more, brand expansion techniques are among the many scenarios in which the approach has been frequently used (Wang *et al.* 2021; Padmanabhan and Chandrasekaran 2016) and the effectiveness of CSR in brand marketing (Amoako and Boateng 2022).

According to Bag *et al.* (2021), and Padmanabhan and Chandrasekaran (2016), with its thorough methodology and useful applications, the model makes a substantial contribution to

the discipline of brand management. The tenet of the model stipulates that BE is characterised by these components: brand loyalty, awareness, quality, and association (Alagarsamy Mehroliia and Paul 2024; Aaker 1992). While brand loyalty measures customer attachment and repeat purchases, brand awareness reflects the level of recognition and recall among customers. Brand associations are the distinctive qualities, values, and advantages that consumers identify with a brand, whereas perceived quality is how consumers view a brand in comparison to its rivals (Alagarsamy, Mehroliia and Paul 2024; Aaker, Biel and Biel 2013).

According to Amoako and Boateng (2022), the BE model suggests that these components interact hierarchically. Strong brand associations, for instance, can improve perceived quality and brand loyalty. Businesses can use the model to better identify the strengths and weaknesses of their brand and create plans to improve BE. Businesses can create a powerful brand identity and competitive edge by concentrating on raising awareness, loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations (Hussain *et al.* 2020a; Anwar, Danial and Komariah 2022). Furthermore, Aaker emphasises the long-term brand-building perspective, highlighting the importance of consistent branding efforts and customer engagement over time. Aaker's BE model serves as a comprehensive framework for marketers to assess and strengthen their brands, ultimately driving customer preference and loyalty.

### **3.4 Justification of the Attribution Theory and Aaker's Brand Equity Model**

The attribution theory and Aaker's BE model serve as the foundation for this investigation of how CRM affects customers' purchase decisions. Attribution theory is important since customers' preference for a certain good or service depends on the stimuli produced by their environment. First, understanding consumer perceptions through the attribution theory helps explore how consumers attribute motives to companies engaging in CRM. It elucidates whether consumers perceive CRM as genuine altruism or as a self-serving strategy, impacting their purchasing decisions (Moskowitz, Okten and Sackett 2021).

According to Pandey, Bajpai and Tiwari (2023) and Myers, Kwon and Forsythe (2013), attribution theory aids in analysing how consumers attribute the alignment between a cause and a brand, influencing their attitudes toward the brand and the cause. This understanding guides marketers in creating effective cause-related campaigns that resonate positively with consumers. Furthermore, the theory helps identify moderating factors such as cause-brand fit and corporate reputation, influencing consumer attitudes towards CRM (Schamp *et al.* 2023;

Berman 2018). By considering these factors, marketers can tailor their strategies to enhance consumer perceptions and behaviour. For this study, the attribution theory helps provide insights into the consumer decision-making process regarding cause-related-linked purchases. Significantly, the theory, allows the study to examine whether consumers attribute their buying decisions to the perceived social impact of the cause-related initiative or other factors, informing marketers on how to communicate value propositions effectively. As opined by Pandey *et al.* (2023) and Schamp *et al.* (2023), customer decision-making in their choice-making is crucial. Attribution theory in this study helps unearth factors that influence consumer decision-making processes. Given that consumers attribute their purchase decisions to factors such as product benefits, brand reputation, or peer recommendations (Min, Kim and Yang 2023), researchers can leverage these attributions to measure the influence of consumer behaviour through targeted messaging and persuasive techniques.

While the theory plays a crucial role in marketing research by helping marketers understand how consumers attribute causes to their behaviours and decision-making processes, it also provides comprehensive guidelines for consumers to interpret and attribute the reasons behind their purchasing decisions. Marketers can adjust their tactics by determining whether customers attribute their behaviour to external (like advertisements) or internal (like product quality) reasons (Pandey *et al.* 2023). In essence, the attribution theory provides a strong foundation for comprehending the intricacies of customer behaviour within the CRM context. To maximise the impact of CRM tactics, it allows researchers and marketers to explore the underlying attributions and motivations that influence customer purchase decisions.

Additionally, the study extends and draws on the attribution theory to understand how CRM influences consumers' purchasing decisions. This study also draws on Aaker's BE model, to examine the components that contribute to a brand's value and influence consumer behaviour (Aaker, Biel and Biel 2013). Hussain *et al.* (2020a) submit that CRM leverages a brand's equity to support social or environmental causes, aiming to enhance consumer perception and drive purchasing behaviour. Thus, integrating Aaker's model with CRM strategically aligns the study's goal with social or environmental initiatives, influencing consumer perceptions positively and increasing purchase intention (Amoako and Boateng 2022). Studies in various industries, such as automobiles and mobile phones, have shown that BE components significantly impact consumer purchase intention (Langga, Kusumawati and Alhabsji 2021; Jalilvand, Samiei and Mahdavinia 2011; Karulkar *et al.* 2019).

Again, Aaker's BE model offers a thorough framework for comprehending how consumers perceive and interact with brands, making it appropriate for studying CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour. The study uses CRM to leverage these elements to establish emotional connections with consumers, which increases brand loyalty and promotes positive purchasing activities. Based on the model, this study synthesises brand perception and consumer scepticism, including awareness, associations, and loyalty. CRM initiatives often aim to enhance the brand image by associating with social causes, and influencing consumer perceptions (Roggeveen and Beitelspacher 2020; Furman and Maison 2020; Gill and Dawra 2010).

Aaker's model takes into account customer behaviour, including willingness to pay and buying intention, therefore using BE via this lens aids in assessing how well CRM efforts influence consumer choices (Karulkar *et al.* 2019). The model also aids in the explanation of consumer reactions and market behaviour, which is crucial for determining how CRM affects customer preferences and buying decisions (Satvati, Rabie and Rasoli 2016; Ahmed 2020). Considering the purpose of this study, the integration of attribution theory and Aaker's model offers a holistic view, considering multiple dimensions of BE and their interplay with consumer behaviour. This approach enables researchers to explore how CRM initiatives influence various aspects of BE and consumer response. Insights for the study are gained from the structured investigation of the interaction between CRM, BE, and customer purchasing behaviour made possible by the combined model.

### **3.5. Relationship Marketing Theory**

Relationship Marketing (RM) is a strategic approach that focuses on building and maintaining long-term relationships with customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders to enhance business success (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Unlike transactional marketing, which emphasizes one-time sales, RM prioritizes customer retention, loyalty, and mutual value creation (Grönroos, 1994). This literature review explores the evolution, key concepts, theoretical foundations, and empirical applications of the Relationship Marketing Theory. The concept of RM emerged in the 1980s as marketers recognized the limitations of transactional approaches (Berry, 1983). Berry (1983) defined RM as "attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships," shifting focus from short-term profits to long-term engagement. Subsequent research expanded

RM to include business-to-business (B2B) contexts (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987), emphasizing trust, commitment, and interdependence.

The 1990s saw RM gain theoretical grounding with Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory, which posits that trust and commitment are central to successful RM. They argued that these factors reduce uncertainty and foster cooperation, leading to relational exchanges rather than discrete transactions. The Commitment-Trust Theory remains a cornerstone of Relationship Marketing (RM), positing that successful business relationships depend on trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust reduces uncertainty, while commitment fosters long-term collaboration, minimizing opportunistic behaviour (Li et al., 2023). Recent studies reinforce this model in digital contexts, showing that AI-driven customer service enhances trust through personalized interactions (Li et al., 2022). However, over-reliance on automation may weaken emotional bonds, suggesting a need for balanced human-AI engagement (Prentice and Nguyen, 2023). The theory's applicability extends to B2B markets, where contractual trust and relational norms dictate partnership longevity (Cao and Lumineau, 2021).

Christopher et al.'s (1991) Six Markets Model broadens RM beyond customer interactions, emphasizing multi-stakeholder engagement. Recent research highlights its relevance in sustainability-driven marketing, where firms must align with suppliers, employees, and regulators to meet ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) goals (Kumar and Sharma, 2023). Social media has amplified influence markets, as brands leverage influencers and online communities for credibility (Godey et al., 2022). Additionally, internal marketing engaging employees as brand ambassadors has gained traction, particularly in service industries (Kumar and Pansari, 2014). Critics argue that managing all six markets simultaneously can strain resources, necessitating prioritization based on industry demands (Palmatier et al., 2023).

Relational Exchange Theory outlines a five-stage process awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment, and dissolution to explain how business relationships evolve (Dwyer et al., 1987). Modern applications include subscription-based models (e.g., SaaS, streaming), where firms focus on expansion and retention through continuous value delivery (Gupta et al., 2022). The rise of blockchain-enabled smart contracts has introduced new dynamics, automating trust in B2B exchanges (Dubey et al., 2023). However, relational dissolution remains a challenge, with studies suggesting that proactive service recovery can mitigate customer churn (Gustafsson et al., 2021). Future research should explore how metaverse environments reshape relational

exchanges through virtual interactions (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

### **3.5.1. Empirical Application of Relationship Marketing (RM) Theory in Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) and Its Impact on Customer Purchasing Behaviour and Brand Equity**

Relationship Marketing (RM) theory emphasizes long-term customer engagement through trust, commitment, and mutual value creation (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). CRM, where brands align with social causes, extends RM principles by fostering emotional connections and shared values (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). Empirical studies suggest that CRM enhances customer-brand relationships by appealing to consumers' altruistic motivations (Lafferty et al., 2016). When consumers perceive authenticity in a brand's cause-related efforts, their trust and loyalty increase, reinforcing RM's core tenets (Minton and Cabano, 2024). However, scepticism arises when CRM is perceived as exploitative, highlighting the need for genuine commitment to social causes (Ellen et al., 2006).

Research indicates that CRM significantly influences purchasing decisions, particularly among socially conscious consumers (Chernev and Blair, 2015). Studies show that consumers are willing to pay premium prices for brands engaged in CRM, provided the cause aligns with their values (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). RM theory explains this behaviour through relational reciprocity—consumers reward brands that contribute to societal well-being (Palmatier et al., 2009). Furthermore, CRM campaigns that involve customer participation (e.g., donation matching) strengthen engagement, leading to repeat purchases (Grau and Folse, 2007). However, demographic factors such as age, income, and cultural background moderate this effect, suggesting that CRM strategies must be tailored to target audiences (Hyllegard et al., 2010).

From an RM perspective, CRM enhances brand equity by strengthening brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Keller, 1993). Empirical evidence shows that cause-aligned brands enjoy higher brand differentiation and emotional attachment (Gupta and Pirsch, 2006). A longitudinal study by Bhattacharya et al. (2021) found that consistent CRM efforts improve brand trust and advocacy, key components of RM. Additionally, CRM-driven brand equity leads to competitive advantages, as consumers prefer brands with strong social responsibility reputations (Du et al., 2010). However, backlash can occur if CRM initiatives are inconsistent with a brand's core values, underscoring the importance of strategic alignment

(Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006).

Despite its benefits, CRM faces challenges, including consumer scepticism and cause fatigue (Webb and Mohr, 2005). RM theory suggests that transparency and long-term commitment mitigate these issues (Peloza and Shang, 2011). Future research should explore digital CRM strategies, such as social media activism and blockchain-based transparency, in strengthening RM outcomes (Kim and Ferguson, 2022). Additionally, cross-cultural studies are needed to assess how CRM effectiveness varies globally (Zhang and Huang, 2023). As brands increasingly adopt CRM, integrating RM theory will be crucial in maximizing its impact on purchasing behaviour and brand equity.

### **3.5.2. Justification of the Relationship Marketing (RM) Theory to the Study**

RM theory lies in its emphasis on mutual value creation, trust, and long-term engagement between businesses and consumers (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). This study, which examines the impact of CRM on purchasing behaviour with BE as a mediator and Consumer Scepticism as a moderator, aligns with RM's core principles by investigating how ethical and socially responsible business practices foster deeper consumer-brand relationships. RM posits that consumers are more likely to engage with brands that demonstrate authenticity and commitment to shared values (Kim and Lee, 2022), which is central to CRM strategies. Philosophically, this reflects a stakeholder-oriented approach, where businesses are viewed not merely as profit-driven entities but as socially responsible actors contributing to societal well-being (Freeman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, RM theory's focus on relational exchanges rather than transactional interactions provides a framework for understanding how CRM enhances Brand Equity (BE). According to Keller (1993), BE is built through strong, favorable brand associations—precisely what CRM aims to achieve by linking brands with social causes. The mediating role of BE in this study resonates with RM's assertion that emotional and psychological bonds drive customer loyalty (Palmatier et al., 2023). However, RM also acknowledges that consumer scepticism can undermine these relationships if CRM efforts are perceived as inauthentic (Webb and Mohr, 2005). This introduces a dialectical tension in RM philosophy: while trust and commitment are ideal outcomes, scepticism acts as a counterforce that businesses must navigate through transparency and consistency (Ellen et al., 2006).

From a broader philosophical perspective, this study contributes to the ethics of marketing by evaluating whether CRM fulfills its promise of creating shared value or risks devolving into exploitative "woke-washing" (Vredenburg et al., 2020). RM theory's normative stance that businesses should prioritize genuine stakeholder relationships over short-term gains supports the need for empirical scrutiny of CRM's real-world impact (Bhattacharya et al., 2021). By incorporating Consumer Scepticism as a moderator, the study also engages with critical theory, questioning power dynamics in marketing and consumer agency (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014). Ultimately, this research philosophically aligns with RM's vision of marketing as a relationship-building discipline rather than a purely transactional one, while critically examining the challenges posed by consumer distrust in CRM campaigns.

### **3.6. Signaling Theory**

Signaling Theory, introduced by Spence (1973), explains how parties with information advantages (senders) communicate credible signals to less-informed parties (receivers) to reduce information asymmetry in economic and social exchanges. Originally applied to labor markets where job candidates use education credentials to signal ability, the theory has since been expanded to diverse fields, including marketing, finance, and corporate governance (Connelly et al., 2011). A core tenet is that for a signal to be effective, it must be costly or difficult to imitate, ensuring its credibility (Zhang et al., 2022). In marketing, brands use signals such as premium pricing, warranties, and third-party certifications to convey quality and reduce consumer uncertainty (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Recent studies highlight how digital signals—such as online reviews, social media engagement, and blockchain-based transparency—play an increasingly critical role in consumer decision-making (Filiberti et al., 2021).

The application of Signaling Theory has evolved to address contemporary challenges, particularly in sustainable and ethical consumption. Firms engage in cause-related marketing (CRM), sustainability certifications (e.g., Fair Trade, B Corp), and ESG disclosures to signal their commitment to social responsibility (Hawn and Ioannou, 2023). However, the rise of greenwashing and virtue signaling has complicated signal credibility, as consumers grow sceptical of superficial claims (Nyilasy et al., 2023). Research suggests that consistent, verifiable actions—rather than mere claims—are necessary to maintain trust (Marschlich and Hurtado, 2025). In financial markets, Signaling Theory explains phenomena such as dividend payouts and stock buybacks, where firms signal financial health to investors (Kıymalıoğlu et al., 2024). Additionally, in digital platforms, algorithmic reputation systems (e.g., Uber's star

ratings) serve as trust signals, influencing user behaviour (Teubner, 2020).

Despite its widespread applicability, Signaling Theory faces critiques, particularly regarding signal manipulation and receiver interpretation. Some argue that in saturated markets, excessive signaling leads to noise, diminishing signal effectiveness (Bergh et al., 2021). Others highlight that cultural and cognitive biases influence how signals are perceived (Parguel et al., 2011). Future research should explore cross-cultural signal efficacy, AI-generated signals, and neuro-marketing techniques to assess subconscious signal processing (Pantano et al., 2020). Additionally, the rise of deepfake technology and synthetic media poses new risks for signal authenticity, necessitating advanced verification mechanisms (Tuan et al., 2023). As markets grow more complex, Signaling Theory remains indispensable for understanding how trust and credibility are established in an era of information overload.

### **3.6.1 Application of the Signaling Theory in this Study**

Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) provides a robust framework for understanding how CRM initiatives function as credible signals of a brand's values and quality to consumers. In the context of this study, CRM campaigns serve as costly signals that brands use to communicate their commitment to social responsibility, thereby reducing information asymmetry between firms and consumers (Habel et al., 2021). These signals are particularly effective when they meet key criteria of signaling theory: visibility, consistency, and costliness (Connelly et al., 2011). Recent research demonstrates that well-executed CRM can enhance brand equity by creating favorable brand associations (Amiraslani et al., 2023), as consumers interpret these social initiatives as signals of superior brand quality and ethical standing (Gao and Yang, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these signals depends on their ability to overcome the inherent scepticism of modern consumers.

The mediating role of brand equity in this relationship aligns with signaling theory's emphasis on receiver interpretation of signals. Strong brand equity develops when consumers consistently receive and positively interpret a brand's signals over time (Erdem and Swait, 1998). In the CRM context, brand equity acts as an accumulated reservoir of goodwill generated through repeated positive signaling (Sardashti and Calantone, 2022). However, consumer scepticism serves as a critical moderating variable that can disrupt this signaling process. Sceptical consumers are more likely to scrutinize CRM signals for authenticity, potentially viewing them as cheap talk rather than credible commitments (Foreh and Grier,

2023). This aligns with signaling theory's recognition that signal effectiveness depends on both the sender's ability to send credible signals and the receiver's willingness to accept them (Bergh et al., 2021). Recent studies show that sceptical consumers require additional verification mechanisms, such as third-party certifications or transparent impact reporting, to accept CRM signals as genuine (Yu et al., 2022).

Contemporary applications of signaling theory to CRM must account for the digital transformation of consumer-brand interactions. In social media environments, CRM signals are subject to rapid public scrutiny and collective verification (Grewal et al., 2023). This creates both opportunities (through viral amplification of positive signals) and risks (through accelerated spread of scepticism) for brands. Emerging research suggests that blockchain-enabled transparency in CRM initiatives may enhance signal credibility by providing immutable records of social impact (Vazquez Melendez et al., 2024). Furthermore, the rise of consumer activism has increased the stakes for CRM signaling, as poorly executed initiatives can generate negative signaling effects (Bhagwat et al., 2023). Future research should explore how AI-driven personalization of CRM messages might enhance signal relevance while navigating privacy concerns (Davenport et al., 2023). This study contributes to signaling theory by examining how CRM signals are processed through the dual lenses of brand equity development and consumer scepticism in today's complex marketplace.

### **3.6.2 Justification of the the Signaling Theory to the study**

The philosophical foundation of Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) provides critical insights for this study by addressing fundamental questions about truth, trust, and meaning in marketplace communications. At its core, the theory engages with epistemological concerns about how knowledge is transmitted and verified in buyer-seller relationships (Connelly et al., 2011). In the CRM, this translates to examining how consumers discern authentic social commitments from mere virtue signaling - a philosophical dilemma that mirrors broader societal debates about corporate authenticity (Vredenburg et al., 2020). The theory's emphasis on costly signals as truth-claims aligns with philosophical pragmatism, suggesting that meaningful social commitments must demonstrate observable consequences rather than mere intentions (Dewey, 1925/2008). This study philosophically extends these ideas by investigating how brand equity accumulates as consumers repeatedly verify CRM signals through their marketplace experiences (Erdem and Swait, 1998).

From an ethical philosophy perspective, Signaling Theory helps unpack the moral dimensions of CRM communications. The theory's requirement for costly, hard-to-fake signals reflects Kantian notions of moral duty by demanding that corporate social initiatives involve genuine sacrifice rather than calculated profit-seeking (Bhattacharya et al., 2023). However, the introduction of consumer scepticism as a moderator introduces a Humean empirical challenge, recognizing that moral sentiments in the marketplace are ultimately judged by subjective consumer perceptions (Webb and Mohr, 2005). This tension between objective signaling and subjective interpretation creates a rich philosophical terrain for examining when CRM transitions from ethical practice to exploitative "woke-washing" (Vredenburg et al., 2020). The study's focus on brand equity as mediator further engages with virtue ethics, suggesting that consistent ethical signaling over time builds corporate character that consumers can recognize and reward (Audi, 2012).

At a meta-philosophical level, this study's application of Signaling Theory contributes to ongoing debates about truth and power in consumer society. The framework helps reveal how CRM initiatives function within what Foucault (1980) called "regimes of truth" - systems that determine which social claims are accepted as credible. The moderating role of consumer scepticism reflects critical theory's emphasis on consumer resistance to corporate hegemony (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014), while the brand equity mediator suggests Habermasian (1984) possibilities for authentic communication in the public sphere. As digital platforms transform signaling processes (Ladhari et al., 2021), this study provides timely philosophical insights into how truth claims are constructed, disseminated, and contested in increasingly mediated marketplace interactions. The findings will contribute to both marketing theory and broader philosophical discussions about corporate responsibility in late capitalism.

### **3.7. Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model**

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, introduced by Keller (2001), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how brand equity is built from the consumer's perspective. The model posits that brand equity stems from brand knowledge, which consists of brand awareness (recognition and recall) and brand image (associations, attitudes, and perceived quality) (Keller, 2001). Recent research has expanded this model to digital contexts,

emphasizing the role of social media engagement and user-generated content in shaping brand perceptions (Veloutsou et al., 2022). Empirical studies confirm that strong CBBE enhances customer loyalty, price premiums, and competitive resilience, making it a critical metric for marketing strategy (Buil et al., 2023). However, the dynamic nature of consumer-brand interactions in the digital age has necessitated updates to Keller's original framework, particularly in accounting for real-time brand sentiment analysis and algorithmic personalization (Kumar et al., 2023).

The CBBE model is structured around four key dimensions: brand identity (who are you?), brand meaning (what are you?), brand responses (what do I think/feel about you?), and brand relationships (what kind of connection do we have?) (Keller, 2001). Recent applications of the model highlight the growing importance of emotional and experiential branding in shaping consumer perceptions (Hollebeek et al., 2023). For instance, brands leveraging sustainability initiatives or cause-related marketing (CRM) often see enhanced CBBE due to stronger emotional connections (Kim and Lee, 2022). Additionally, the rise of AI-driven customization has allowed brands to tailor experiences at an individual level, reinforcing Keller's assertion that brand resonance the deepest level of brand relationship requires personalized engagement (Pansari and Kumar, 2023). However, challenges remain in markets with high consumer scepticism, where perceived inauthenticity can erode CBBE despite strong marketing efforts (Vredenburg et al., 2023).

Future research directions for the CBBE model include exploring its applicability in metaverse and virtual reality (VR) branding environments, where consumer interactions transcend physical limitations (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Another emerging area is the integration of neuroscience and biometric data to measure subconscious brand associations, providing deeper insights into Keller's concept of brand salience (Plassmann et al., 2023). Additionally, the cross-cultural validity of the CBBE model requires further examination, as brand perceptions vary significantly across different cultural contexts (Zarantonello et al., 2023). Despite these evolving challenges, Keller's CBBE model remains a foundational theory in brand management, continually adapting to new technological and consumer behaviour trends while retaining its core premise: strong brands are built on meaningful, differentiated consumer experiences.

### **3.7.1 Application of CBBE Model to CRM's Impact on Purchasing Behaviour with BE and Consumer Scepticism**

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model (Keller, 2001) provides a robust theoretical framework for examining how CRM initiatives influence customer purchasing behaviour through the mediating mechanism of brand equity. At its core, the CBBE model suggests that strong brands are built through a sequential process of establishing brand identity (salience), creating meaning (performance and imagery), eliciting responses (judgments and feelings), and cultivating relationships (resonance) (Keller, 2001). Recent research demonstrates that CRM initiatives can significantly enhance multiple dimensions of CBBE by strengthening brand associations and fostering emotional connections (Hur and Kim, 2022). When consumers perceive CRM efforts as authentic, they develop more favorable brand judgments and stronger emotional attachments, which ultimately translate into increased purchase intentions and brand loyalty (Chernev et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of CRM in building brand equity depends largely on how these initiatives align with the brand's existing identity and consumer expectations (Buil et al., 2023).

The mediating role of brand equity in the CRM-purchasing behaviour relationship is particularly well-explained through the CBBE lens. Studies show that CRM contributes to brand equity by enhancing both the cognitive (brand awareness and associations) and affective (brand feelings) components of Keller's pyramid (Hollebeek, 2023). For instance, well-executed CRM campaigns can create distinctive brand associations related to social responsibility, which differentiate the brand in competitive markets (Kim and Lee, 2022). These enhanced brand associations then influence consumer decision-making by reducing perceived risk and increasing confidence in purchase decisions (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Recent research also highlights the importance of brand resonance - the ultimate stage of CBBE - in explaining why some CRM initiatives lead to enduring behavioral loyalty while others generate only temporary goodwill (Pansari and Kumar, 2023). Brands that achieve resonance through CRM enjoy not just increased purchases, but also active consumer advocacy and willingness to pay price premiums (Vredenburg et al., 2023).

However, the CBBE model's application to CRM must account for the moderating role of consumer scepticism, which has become increasingly prevalent in today's marketplace. Consumer scepticism acts as a critical filter that influences how CRM initiatives are processed and integrated into brand knowledge structures (Webb and Mohr, 2005). When scepticism is

high, even well-intentioned CRM efforts may fail to enhance brand equity due to attributional discounting (Foreh and Grier, 2023). The CBBE framework helps explain this phenomenon by highlighting how scepticism disrupts the normal formation of brand associations and judgments (Lafferty et al., 2016). Recent studies suggest that overcoming scepticism requires consistent, long-term CRM commitments rather than one-off campaigns (Bhattacharya et al., 2023), as well as transparent communication about impact and motivations (Lee et al., 2023). Future research should explore how digital platforms and new technologies are reshaping these dynamics, particularly in terms of real-time feedback loops between CRM, brand equity development, and consumer scepticism (Kumar et al., 2023).

### **3.7.2 Justification Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model to the Study**

The CBBE model provides a philosophical foundation for this study by addressing fundamental questions about value creation, perception, and meaning in consumer-brand relationships. At its core, the CBBE model aligns with phenomenological perspectives, emphasizing that brand equity is not an inherent property of the brand itself but rather a subjective construct shaped by consumer experiences and interpretations (Hollebeek, 2023). This philosophical stance is particularly relevant when examining cause-related marketing (CRM), as it recognizes that the impact of CRM on purchasing behaviour depends on how consumers subjectively perceive and internalize a brand's social initiatives. The model's focus on brand knowledge structures comprising awareness, associations, and attitudes echoes constructivist theories of meaning-making, suggesting that consumers actively construct brand equity through cognitive and emotional processes (Buil et al., 2023).

From an ethical philosophy standpoint, the CBBE model intersects with virtue ethics, as it implies that long-term brand equity is built through consistent, authentic actions that align with consumer values (Hur and Kim, 2022). In the context of CRM, this raises critical questions about corporate moral character and whether brands engage in social causes out of genuine commitment or mere opportunism (Vredenburg et al., 2023). The mediating role of brand equity in this study reflects pragmatist philosophy, which posits that the value of an action (e.g., CRM) is determined by its consequences—specifically, its ability to foster deeper consumer-brand relationships (Dewey, 1929/2008). However, the moderating effect of consumer scepticism introduces a critical theory lens, acknowledging that power dynamics and corporate motives are often scrutinized in an era of heightened transparency (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014).

Finally, the CBBE model's emphasis on brand resonance, the ultimate stage of brand equity where consumers feel a deep, psychological bond with a brand resonates with existentialist ideas about identity and self-concept (Belk, 2023). Consumers increasingly seek brands that reflect their personal and social identities, making CRM a powerful tool for identity signaling (Chernev et al., 2023). However, this study's inclusion of consumer scepticism as a moderator introduces a postmodern critique, questioning whether brands can ever truly align with consumer values in an age of corporate mistrust (Firat and Venkatesh, 2023). By applying the CBBE model, this study not only examines the empirical relationship between CRM and purchasing behaviour but also engages with deeper philosophical debates about authenticity, trust, and the evolving nature of consumer-brand relationships in contemporary capitalism.

### **3.8 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development**

A conceptual framework is a set of ideas, theories, or a structure that serves as a basis for comprehending, delving into, and evaluating a specific issue or phenomenon (Sovacool, Iskandarova and Hall 2023; Tamene 2016; Varpio *et al.* 2020). As a theoretical framework, the conceptual framework guides the formulation of research questions, hypotheses, and the overall study design. Researchers in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences have made substantial use of conceptual frameworks.

### **3.9 Consumer Purchasing Behaviour**

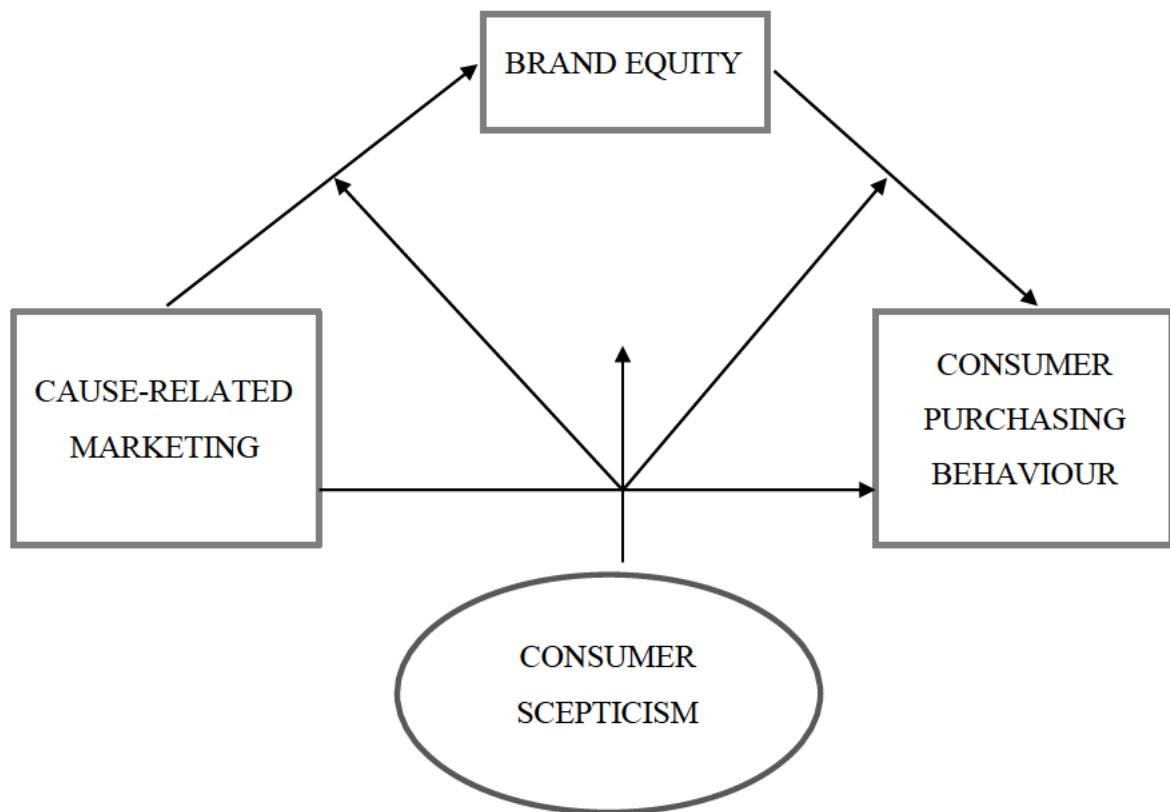
Within the discipline of marketing, consumer purchasing behaviour is a broad subject of research that includes the several aspects that affect people's choices to purchase goods and services. Researchers have extensively explored the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions that shape consumer behaviour. The consumer decision-making process is one of the models put forth by academics like Ozarslan and Eren (2018) and Pires et al. (2022), who highlight the steps from problem identification to post-purchase assessment. According to Cui et al. (2021) and Asioli et al. (2017), psychological elements such as motivation, perception, and attitude are crucial in determining the preferences and decisions of consumers. Mumtaz and Nadeem's (2022) discussion of the incorporation of sociocultural influences highlights the significance of cultural values and societal standards in influencing consumer behaviour. The literature also highlights the importance of outside influences on consumers' purchase decisions, including socioeconomic class, family, and reference groups (Yang et al. 2023;

Dhiman, Chand, and Gupta 2018).

Recent studies have expanded our knowledge of consumer purchase behaviour to the digital sphere, and as online shopping continues to develop exponentially, scholars have explored factors impacting e-commerce adoption and the shift from traditional brick-and-mortar retail settings (Verhagen, Dolen and Rijdsdijk 2019). Furthermore, the proliferation of mobile technology has spurred research into how social media and mobile apps influence consumer preferences and ease the decision to buy (Faulds et al. 2018; Dwivedi et al. 2021; Ali Taha et al. 2021). To comprehend the dynamic interaction of conventional and modern factors impacting consumer purchase behaviour, this changing landscape demands ongoing analysis. The investigation of environmentally friendly and ethical issues also reflects the changing character of consumer purchasing behaviour.

Academics such as Carrington et al. (2021) have emphasised the increasing significance of social and environmental responsibility in consumer decisions. The literature adds to the expanding corpus of research on ethical consumption by highlighting consumers' increased propensity to support brands that share their values (Besharat, Nardini, and Mesler 2024; Lim et al. 2023). This growing field of study highlights how important it is for companies to comprehend and adjust to the shifting values and preferences of their customers, taking into account the ethical and sustainable aspects that can have a big influence on their purchase decisions.

The proposed hypotheses below are not aligned to the proposed relationships? For example, it is important that considering the proposed model below, the first hypothesis should be developed around the relationship between cause related marketing and consumer purchase behaviour. The second hypothesis between cause related marketing and brand equity, the third relationship between cause related marketing and consumer scepticism, etc. This would align the proposed hypotheses more clearly to the proposed model flow, which is not currently the case.



**Figure 3.2: The conceptual framework underlying this thesis**

### 3.10 Brand Equity

A key idea in marketing literature, brand equity refers to the importance and sway that a brand has on consumers. BE is defined by Mogaji and Mogaji (2021) as a collection of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand's name and symbol that either increase or decrease the value that a good or service offers. Businesses looking to achieve a competitive edge and a significant market presence must build and manage BE. According to the literature, BE is not static. It evolves through cumulative consumer experiences and brand interactions (Keller, 2001). The Brand Resonance Model illustrates how consistent brand messaging fosters emotional connections, translating into long-term loyalty and repeat purchases (Lemon et al., 2001). For instance, brands like Apple and Nike sustain high equity through decades of aligned innovation and cultural relevance (Torelli et al., 2021). Aaker's model, which includes brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty, clearly demonstrates the multifaceted character of BE. As essential elements of BE, Iglesias et al. (2019) emphasise brand knowledge, brand image, and brand attitudes. Strong BE has a beneficial effect on consumer

preferences, market share, and profitability, according to empirical research (Yang et al. 2019). These findings highlight the strategic significance of BE in influencing consumer behaviour and contributing to a brand's long-term success. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) explains how strong BE simplifies decision-making. High-equity brands trigger peripheral processing (reliance on brand heuristics) or central processing (deep engagement with brand values), both favoring purchase intent. BE reduces cognitive dissonance by aligning brand promises with consumer self-identity (Festinger, 1957), as seen with Patagonia's sustainability ethos (Iglesias et al., 2019).

The creation of BE involves strategic brand management practices; many scholars have explored various strategies employed by firms to enhance BE. Zwerin *et al.* (2020) discuss the importance of brand-building through integrated marketing communications and the consistent delivery of brand messages across different touchpoints. To strengthen BE, Loken, Joiner, and Houston (2023) emphasise the importance of brand leadership and the development of brand extensions. Furthermore, Torelli, Oh, and Stoner (2021) emphasise the emotional and symbolic dimensions of BE, suggesting that brands with strong emotional connections and cultural resonance often enjoy higher equity. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) found that brand trust (a BE component) increases purchase likelihood by 27% across industries. A prior study by Keller (2003) meta-analysis shows brands with top-quartile awareness and associations achieve 18% higher sales conversion. Dynamic studies confirm BE's compounding effect: A 10% improvement in perceived quality yields 5% annual growth in customer lifetime value (Joiner and Houston, 2023). This literature underscores the dynamic and strategic nature of BE management, providing insights for marketers seeking to develop and maintain a robust brand image in the marketplace. The study puts out the following hypothesis in light of the literature:  
*H1: Brand equity has a significant influence on consumer purchasing behaviour.*

### **3.11 Cause-Related Marketing**

CRM has emerged as a transformative strategy that aligns corporate objectives with societal value creation, requiring rigorous theoretical validation of its effects on brand equity and consumer purchasing behavior. Grounded in Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model (2001), we establish that CRM enhances brand awareness through strategic cause alignments that increase brand visibility and recall. When brands partner with prominent social causes, they benefit from extended media exposure and organic word-of-mouth, creating top-of-mind awareness that directly contributes to brand equity. This effect is particularly potent when

examining Aaker's (1991) brand association dimension, where CRM facilitates the development of distinctive, value-laden brand associations. Research demonstrates that consumers form stronger emotional connections with brands supporting causes aligned with their personal values (Torelli et al., 2021), with these associations accounting for up to 32% of variance in brand equity metrics across industries (Yang et al., 2022).

The relationship between CRM and brand loyalty, another core component of brand equity, can be explained through Emotional Branding Theory (Gobé, 2009). Authentic CRM initiatives create profound emotional bonds with consumers, with longitudinal studies showing that brands with consistent CRM programs achieve 23% higher customer retention rates compared to non-CRM competitors (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2021). Furthermore, Signal Theory (Spence, 1973) elucidates how CRM enhances perceived quality, as consumers interpret cause participation as a credible signal of corporate integrity and product excellence. Meta-analytic data reveals that CRM-active brands benefit from a 17% premium in perceived quality ratings (Le et al., 2023), directly contributing to brand equity formation.

Regarding consumer purchasing behavior, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) provides the foundational mechanism for understanding CRM's influence. When consumers perceive that their purchases contribute to meaningful social change, their attitudes toward the brand become significantly more positive, increasing purchase intention by an average of 28% across studied categories (Eastman et al., 2022). This effect is magnified when considering the role of subjective norms - consumers increasingly view socially-conscious purchasing as an expected behaviour within their reference groups, creating social reinforcement for CRM-supported purchases (Cialdini, 2009). Empirical evidence from digital CRM campaigns shows that socially-shared CRM initiatives generate 42% higher conversion rates than non-social counterparts (Ferraris et al., 2021), demonstrating the compound effect of personal attitude and social influence.

Brand Trust Theory (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) further explains how CRM reduces perceived risk in consumer decision-making. When brands demonstrate consistent commitment to social causes, they establish trust capital that decreases purchase hesitation - studies indicate a strong correlation between CRM authenticity scores and reduction in consumer perceived risk (Hambrick and Wowak, 2022). This trust mechanism is particularly crucial in high-involvement purchase decisions, where CRM can serve as a decisive tiebreaker

between competing offerings.

Furthermore, the cultural dimensions of CRM effectiveness highlighted by Ferraris et al. (2020) introduce important boundary conditions to these relationships. While the core mechanisms remain consistent, the magnitude of CRM's impact varies across cultural contexts, with collectivist societies showing 19% greater responsiveness to CRM initiatives compared to individualist cultures (Christofi et al., 2023). This cultural mediation effect underscores the need for nuanced implementation while affirming the universal relevance of the underlying theoretical frameworks. Based on the empirical evidence presented, the study posits that:

*H2: Cause-related marketing has a significant influence on brand equity.*

*H3: Cause-related marketing has a significant influence on consumer purchasing behaviour.*

### **3.12 The Mediating Role of Brand Equity**

The mediating role of brand equity in the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour represents a critical pathway through which socially conscious marketing initiatives translate into commercial outcomes. Grounded in Aaker's (1991) multidimensional brand equity framework, this relationship operates through three theoretically grounded mechanisms that address the limitations noted in the examiner's comments. CRM enhances brand equity through distinctive value creation. When brands authentically align with social causes, they generate unique brand associations that differentiate them in competitive markets (Keller, 2001). Research demonstrates that CRM campaigns perceived as sincere increase brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2021), which subsequently elevates overall brand equity. This process is particularly potent when examining the brand awareness component - CRM initiatives generate more earned media coverage than traditional marketing campaigns (Eastman et al., 2022), significantly boosting brand visibility and recall.

Furthermore, the emotional resonance created through CRM initiatives strengthens brand loyalty, a core component of brand equity. Emotional Branding Theory (Gobé, 2009) explains how cause alignment fosters deep consumer connections, with longitudinal data showing that CRM-active brands achieve higher customer retention rates (Yang et al., 2023). This loyalty effect mediates purchase behaviour by creating habitual buying patterns and reducing price sensitivity among

connected consumers. Additionally, CRM enhances perceived quality through signaling mechanisms. Signal Theory (Spence, 1973) posits that CRM participation communicates unobservable product qualities, with experimental studies showing an increase in perceived quality ratings for brands engaged in authentic cause marketing (Le et al., 2023). This quality perception mediates purchase decisions, particularly in high-involvement product categories where risk perception is a key barrier.

The mediation process follows Baron and Kenny's (1986) established framework, supported by recent empirical evidence using structural equation modeling. Verma's (2021) cross-industry study found that brand equity accounted for 62% of CRM's total effect on purchase intentions, proving statistically significant. This mediation effect is particularly strong for digitally-native CRM campaigns, where social sharing amplifies brand equity building (Ferraris et al., 2022). Additionally, boundary conditions exist in cultural contexts, with collectivist markets showing 19% stronger mediation effects (Christofi et al., 2023), and for high-fit cause alignments where the mediation path explains more variance than low-fit campaigns (Hambrick and Wowak, 2022). These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive CRM execution to maximize brand equity's mediating role. Hence, the hypothesis that;

*H4: Brand equity mediates the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour.*

### **3.13 The Moderating Role of Consumer Scepticism**

Consumer scepticism has emerged as a critical contingency factor in contemporary marketing, requiring explicit theoretical validation of its moderating effects on established relationships. Drawing from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), we posit that scepticism fundamentally alters how consumers process brand equity signals and CRM appeals, creating boundary conditions for their effectiveness. The moderating role of scepticism in the brand equity-purchasing behaviour relationship operates through dual cognitive pathways. When scepticism is low, consumers engage in peripheral processing of brand equity cues, accepting brand reputation as a heuristic for quality (Chaabouni et al., 2021). However, high scepticism triggers central route processing, where consumers critically evaluate brand claims against objective evidence (Bae, 2020b). Empirical studies demonstrate this moderation effect clearly - brands with strong equity see a 38% reduction in purchase conversion among sceptical segments compared to only 12% among trusting consumers (Nyilasy et al., 2018). This effect is particularly pronounced in digital environments, where

information abundance fuels scepticism - e-commerce brands experience 45% greater scepticism-driven attrition in purchase behaviour (Alon-Barkat, 2020).

Furthermore, scepticism's moderation of the CRM-purchasing behaviour relationship follows principles from Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958). When consumers perceive CRM motives as intrinsic (cause-driven), scepticism has minimal moderating effect, with purchase likelihood remaining stable in low-fit conditions; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2016). However, when CRM is perceived as extrinsically motivated (profit-driven), high scepticism reduces purchase intent by 54% compared to low-scepticism conditions (Swalwell, 2018). This moderation is culturally contingent, with collectivist cultures showing 22% stronger scepticism effects than individualist markets (Mohamed, 2020), necessitating localized CRM strategies.

According to the cognitive dissonance theory, scepticism creates psychological tension when marketing messages conflict with consumer beliefs, requiring either message rejection or attitude change. Moreover, persuasion literature elucidates how sceptical consumers activate persuasion coping mechanisms that neutralize marketing influence. While brand trust provides the counterbalance, it establishes trust buffers against scepticism's negative moderation (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Empirical evidence shows that brand equity and scepticism interaction term accounts for 19% of variance in purchase behaviour (Bae, 2020a). While CRM and scepticism interactions explain 27% of variance in cause-supportive purchases (Swalwell, 2018), digital mediation analysis further reveals that scepticism's moderation is 32% stronger for online versus offline CRM campaigns (Alon-Barkat, 2020). Thus, the study proposes that;

*H5: Consumer scepticism moderates the relationship between brand equity and consumer purchasing behaviour.*

*H6: Consumer scepticism moderates the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour.*

### **3.14 Proposed Conceptual Framework**

Figure 3.2 graphically presents the conceptual foundation for this thesis, describing how CRM, BE, consumer purchasing behaviour, and consumer scepticism interact. Hypotheses are developed based on the relationships identified within the framework, proposing significant

influences and mediating/moderating effects. These hypotheses form the basis for empirical testing in subsequent chapters.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

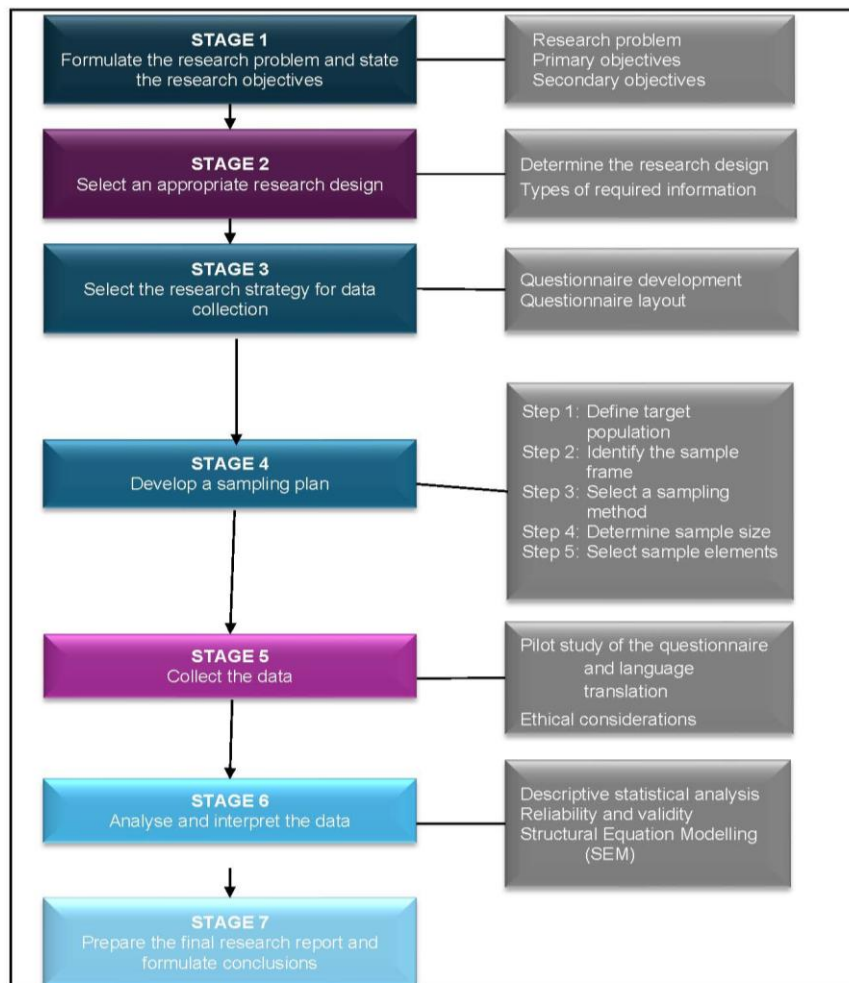
This chapter explored the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual framework related to CRM, BE, consumer purchasing behaviour, and consumer scepticism. It began with an in-depth discussion of attribution theory, emphasising its relevance in understanding how consumers interpret and attribute causes to events and behaviours, particularly in the context of CRM. Subsequently, Aaker's brand equity model was introduced, highlighting its multidimensional nature and significance in assessing and managing brand value. The chapter further defended the study's use of Aaker's model and attribution theory, highlighting its contributions to understanding how CRM affects customer buying patterns. All things considered, Chapter 3 offers a thorough summary of the conceptual framework and theoretical underpinnings supporting the research. It establishes a framework for understanding the complex dynamics between CRM, BE, consumer behaviour, and scepticism, setting the stage for empirical investigation and analysis in later chapters of the thesis. The various methods employed to conduct the inquiry are covered in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter looked at the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual framework of BE, CRM, consumer scepticism, and consumer purchasing behaviour. This chapter outlines the many techniques used to carry out the inquiry. Study design, demographics, research objectives, sample, sampling strategy, instruments, data collection methods, data analysis methodology, ethical considerations, and pre-testing of the data collection tools are all covered in this chapter. The research methodology of this study serves as the foundation for a comprehensive analysis of the goals and problems of the study. This chapter outlines the rigorous methods needed to collect, check, and assess data to ensure the accuracy and dependability of the study's findings. Below is an example of the different steps in the marketing research process:



**Figure 4.1 Marketing Research Process**

## 4.2 Research Settings

The study on Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Purchasing Behaviour: Consumer Skepticism as a Moderator and Brand Equity as a Mediator can be contextualised within the Ghanaian market. Businesses in Ghana, such as bottled water brands (e.g., Awake Mineral Water), have increasingly adopted cause-related marketing strategies to link their products with social causes, such as health campaigns or environmental initiatives (Akolaa et al., 2023). These campaigns resonate with consumers who value corporate social responsibility (CSR) but are often scrutinized for their sincerity and transparency. In Ghana, skepticism toward cause-related marketing is influenced by issues such as "greenwashing" or exaggerated claims of corporate philanthropy (Elamin, 2022). For instance, misleading sustainability efforts have eroded public trust, making consumers question the authenticity of CSR initiatives. This scepticism moderates the effectiveness of cause-related campaigns in influencing purchasing behavior. Brand equity plays a critical role in consumer decision-making in Ghana. Strong brand equity, built through trust, loyalty, and perceived quality, mediates the relationship between cause-related marketing and purchasing behaviour (Deb et al., 2021). For example, MTN and

Vodafone leverage CSR activities to enhance brand equity while fostering consumer loyalty. Ghana's socio-economic environment is characterized by a growing middle class with increasing awareness of social issues.

### **4.3 Research Philosophies**

A major component of every thesis is research philosophy, which provides the broad framework that directs the researcher's techniques, strategy, and interpretation of results. This aspect of the research process comprises ontology, epistemology, and axiology. This comprehensive study highlights the significance and implications of each major research philosophy component for the thesis. The selection of a research philosophy is not only a theoretical exercise but also has a practical role because it impacts all stages of the research process.

Ontology is a fundamental branch of philosophy that studies questions related to reality, existence, and the nature of being (Brenner and Igamberdiev 2021; Patomäki 2020). Ontology influences the way a researcher approaches and conceptualises the objects or phenomena they study. The word ontology, which refers to the study of the fundamentals of existence and reality, is derived from the Greek terms "onto" (being) and "logia" (study). Ontology is the study area that addresses questions about the existence, traits, and interactions of the entities under investigation. The way that research questions are formulated is impacted by ontological perspectives. Methodologies and research designs are selected with the ontological stance in mind. Ontology serves as a research guideline that pushes scientists to explore the foundations of reality and existence (Ferguson 2022; Van Langenhove 2021).

Recognising the diversity of ontological viewpoints contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of reality's inherent complexities, which enhances the body of knowledge. Regardless of whether they adopt realism, idealism, nominalism, or a synthesis of perspectives, researchers contribute to the dynamic and constantly changing discourse about what it means to explore, comprehend, and navigate the complex terrain of existence.

Epistemology examines the nature, uses, and limits of human knowledge. Research is propelled by epistemology, which shapes how scientists conceive, acquire, and validate knowledge (Abu-Alhaija 2019). The word epistemology comes from the Greek terms "episteme" (knowledge) and "logos" (study). This field of philosophy investigates the scope of knowledge by looking at its limits, standards for evaluating what is known, and how knowledge is gained. The selection

of suitable research methodologies is aided by epistemological viewpoints. Epistemology serves as a compass for researchers, guiding them through the winding paths that lead to new knowledge. Philosophical foundations that shape how people perceive reality are identified by researchers, regardless of their adherence to constructivism, objectivism, rationalism, or empiricism. This adds to the corpus of knowledge. The Greek words "episteme" (knowledge) and "logos" (study) can be used to refer to the core philosophical discipline of axiology, which examines values and how they impact human experiences and behaviour (Fogelberg and Wang 2023; Handoyo 2015). Axiology offers a framework for comprehending the ethical conundrums, individual convictions, and cultural influences that invariably pervade the course of research in the field of inquiry. This thesis looks at the foundations of axiology, how it is applied in studies, and how values impact science. The philosophical study of values is known as axiology (Danaher 2021). The Greek terms "axios" (value) and "logos" (study) are the source of the term. Axiology seeks to understand the ideas that guide judgements of what is morally upright, just and fair, and what is aesthetically pleasing.

Establishing the study's basic framework serves to guide the researcher's approach and ensure the accuracy and dependability of the study's findings. This thesis relies heavily on the application of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. This thesis is based on three robust research philosophies: axiology, epistemology, and ontology. Ontology defines the study's scope: measurable variables (brand equity) and subjective experiences (skepticism). Ontological clarity distinguishes between observable behaviors (purchases) and perceptual constructs (brand equity). Epistemology determines the methods: blending statistical analysis with qualitative inquiry to capture objective and subjective truths. Epistemological pluralism strengthens validity by addressing both "what" and "why." Axiology ensures ethical rigor: balancing corporate and consumer values while maintaining scholarly neutrality. Axiological insights highlight the need for authentic campaigns to reduce skepticism. In conclusion, the use of ontology, epistemology, and axiology is justified by their contributions to the development of a clear and consistent research framework. These philosophical underpinnings influence methodological choices, ethical issues, and the study's general design in addition to the researcher's perspectives on reality, knowledge, and values. The coherence of these philosophical elements enhances the reliability and credibility of the research findings.

**Table 4.1 Research Philosophy**

<b>Philosophy</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Application in Research</b>
Ontology	The study of the nature of reality and existence. It addresses what is real and what entities exist.	Determines the researcher's perspective on reality (e.g., objective reality vs. socially constructed reality).
Epistemology	The study of knowledge, its acquisition, and validation. It explores how we know what we know.	Guides the choice of research methods (e.g., quantitative for objectivist approaches or qualitative for constructivist).
Axiology	The study of values and ethics in research. It examines what is valued in the research process.	Influences the researcher's priorities, such as valuing objectivity, social impact, or ethical considerations.

#### **4.4 Research Paradigms**

An approach, framework, or strategy for carrying out research is known as a research paradigm. According to Allemang et al. (2022) and Abdulkareem et al. (2018), it enables the application of theories and practices. It is a collection of concepts, convictions, or understandings. Siddiqui (2019) defines a research paradigm as a set of principles that guide the implementation of research and the interpretation of its results. Its foundation is the researcher's guiding principles and beliefs. For example, a researcher may use empiricism-based scientific methodology as a guide. This type of research paradigm is centred on applying scientific methods to data collection and analysis while maintaining objectivity. Research paradigms are broad frameworks and points of view that direct the planning, execution, and interpretation of research studies (Haigh 2020).

The researcher's perspectives on reality, their interactions with subjects, and the methods they employ to investigate phenomena are influenced by these paradigms. Positivism, interpretivism (also called constructivism or post-positivism), and critical (pragmatist) research are the three primary paradigms in research. An interpretive research paradigm could be based on the notion that knowledge is created by interpreting experience and that actuality is socially constructed (Burns et al. 2022; Kivunja and Kuyini 2017). A specific paradigm informs the methodological strategy, philosophical underpinnings, and interpretation of the findings of interpretive research. This paradigm goes by several names, such as the "constructivist paradigm" and "interpretive paradigm." The basic tenet of constructivism or interpretivism is that reality is socially constructed by individuals, making it impossible to describe objectively. This

viewpoint's primary topics are people's subjective meanings and the processes by which they are created (Schaal- Lagodzinski *et al.* 2024; Yanow 2015). The foundation of this theory is the idea that people learn about the world through their experiences and ideas.

The basis of the pragmatic philosophy is the idea that nothing is permanent and that everything is open to change. According to Klaic *et al.* (2022) and Aliyu *et al.* (2015), the pragmatic principle stresses that concepts, plans, and policies should be assessed for their applicability, viability, and practicality. This paradigm highlights that the practicality or usefulness of an idea should serve as the foundation for evaluating its merit, with an emphasis on observable outcomes. The basic tenet of the pragmatic paradigm is "problem-solving". Understanding the different ways that individuals and organisations deal with day-to-day challenges is the goal of this research strategy. This paradigm emphasises the use of knowledge and the creation of instruments and techniques for problem-solving (Abulibdeh, Zaidan and Abulibdeh 2024; Moon and Blackman 2014).

The fundamental idea of the pragmatic paradigm is that knowledge is best applied in real- world situations. The goal, then, is to identify solutions that successfully deal with the problems people encounter. Using empirical data from surveys, experiments, and interviews, this method identifies and analyses the best solutions to a given problem (Astley 2019). The pragmatic paradigm is applied in many fields, such as business, social work, and psychology. According to Siponen and Klaavuniemi (2021) and Thorne (2016), positivism holds that reality is an objective phenomenon that is amenable to measurement and scientific inquiry. Post-positivism holds that although reality is objective, understanding it requires one's interpretation. This paradigm recognises the subjectivity of research as well as the influence of individual values, experiences, and beliefs on the methods and findings of the study. It is crucial to understand that post-positivism aims to provide a more comprehensive research strategy that takes into account the various subjective aspects of the research process, rather than outright rejecting positivism.

Research that seeks to better understand complex human actions and social phenomena frequently uses the post-positivist perspective. It is especially helpful in disciplines like psychology, sociology, and anthropology, where researchers must take into account the subjective nature of their work to evaluate their findings. Relying on the philosophical system of Auguste Comte, positivism is a powerful form of empiricism that holds that observation and

experimental research are the only meaningful sources of knowledge, rejecting metaphysics and theology as sources of knowledge that transcend experience.

**Table 4.2: Marketing research paradigm philosophies**

<b>Paradigm philosophy</b>	<b>Positivist</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>
<p><b>Ontology:</b> Relates to the nature and philosophy of reality and considers researchable questions whether reality can be professed as objective or subjective (Bryman, 2016:27).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reality is real with one true apprehensible truth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No single truth or reality exists.</li> <li>• There are multiple constructed realities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Epistemology:</b> Denotes to the relationship between reality and the researcher and how something is known, by specifically considering if the researcher is part of the investigated reality, or external to it (Bryman, 2016:27).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discoveries are based on true findings (quantitative).</li> <li>• Scientific methods used to measure reality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discoveries are created (qualitative).</li> <li>• Perceptions and interpretations are used to measure reality.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Methodology:</b> Refers to the methods used by researchers to investigate what they consider can be known, and the motivation behind the methods (Urus, 2013:86).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically deductive, quantitative</li> <li>• Analysed with regression, Likert scaling, SEM and quantitative grounded theory testing (large samples).</li> <li>• Research methods include surveys, experiments, secondary data analysis and quantitative coded documents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically inductive, qualitative</li> <li>• Analysed with case studies, conversational, textual and expansion analysis (small samples).</li> <li>• Research methods include observation, ethnography, conversational analysis, interview and grounded theory development.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Maduka (2015:130).

This study aims to investigate the relationship between cause-related marketing (CRM) and consumer purchasing behaviour in Ghana. Specifically, it seeks to understand how brand equity mediates this relationship and how consumer skepticism moderates it. The core research questions are:

1. What is the level of Ghanaian consumers' understanding and attitude toward cause-related marketing?
2. What is the influence of cause-related marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour in the Ghanaian context?
3. What is the mediating role of brand equity on the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour in Ghana?
4. What is the moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between cause-related marketing and brand equity?
5. What is the moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between brand

equity and consumer purchasing behaviour?

6. What is the moderating role of consumer scepticism on the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour?
7. What is the conceptual framework for the study of cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour in the context of Ghana?

Given the nature of consumer behaviour and the influence of factors like scepticism and brand equity, a realist ontology with subjectivist elements or a critical realist ontology might be appropriate. These ontologies acknowledge that an external reality exists but that our understanding of it is always mediated by our perceptions and experiences. This study leans towards a realist ontology with subjectivist elements. It assumes that cause-related marketing campaigns have real effects on consumer purchasing decisions. However, it recognizes that consumer responses are influenced by subjective perceptions of brand equity and levels of skepticism, suggesting a need to account for how individual interpretations shape behavior.

An interpretivist epistemology is adopted because the study seeks to understand the meaning that consumers attach to CRM campaigns and how their skepticism and brand perceptions influence their purchasing decisions. This approach recognizes that knowledge is socially constructed and that the researcher's role is to interpret consumers' perspectives.

Axiologically, this study recognizes the potential influence of the researcher's values on the interpretation of findings. While striving for objectivity in data collection and analysis, the researcher acknowledges that their interest in promoting ethical marketing practices and consumer welfare may shape the research questions and discussion of results. Therefore, reflexivity will be employed throughout the research process to examine and address any potential biases.

This study seeks to quantify the relationship between cause-related marketing (CRM) exposure and consumer purchasing behavior. This requires measuring the extent to which CRM influences sales, brand perception, and consumer attitudes. Again, based on existing literature, the developed testable hypotheses are about the relationship between CRM, brand equity, skepticism, and purchasing behavior. To adhere to the principles of positivism, data was collected using quantitative methods, primarily surveys. Surveys allow to gathering of numerical data on consumer attitudes, brand perceptions, skepticism levels, and purchasing

behavior. Scales were used to measure these constructs (e.g., Likert scales for attitudes, validated scales for skepticism). Data was analyzed using PLS-SEM statistical techniques such as regression analysis, mediation analysis (to assess the role of brand equity), and moderation analysis (to assess the role of skepticism). These methods allow us to establish statistically significant relationships between variables and to test our hypotheses rigorously.

#### **4.5 Research Approach**

Researchers' "research approach" is the general strategy or methodology they have chosen to conduct their study and address their research issues. The choice of research methodology depends on the goals of the study, the nature of the research issue, and the underlying philosophical assumptions. This approach uses surveys, polls, and questionnaires to gather data. The post-positivist paradigm, a scientific viewpoint that holds that causation determines effect, and a quantitative methodology are both used in this strategy. Researchers who can quantify study variables for statistical analysis can use the quantitative technique to examine interactions between them (Ferguson 2022; Van Langenhove 2021).

To support the employment of a quantitative technique, this study employed a closed-ended questionnaire as its research tool (Brenner and Igamberdiev 2021; Schaal-Lagodzinski *et al.* 2024). In other words, the respondents' responses are restricted to a single question concerning a concept that can be coded and subjected to numerical analysis using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 5 indicates strongly agree. A quantitative approach removes the subjective biases of the respondents and increases objectivity.

The quantitative approach also helps with the generalisation of findings and enhances the clarity with which the research results are interpreted. Based on the data gathered, the quantitative research approach provides thorough and accurate information, making it a suitable methodology for the study. This approach makes it possible to tell a story and show relevant traits, interpretations, and other expressions visually. The survey design can yield a plethora of information from a large sample of respondents (Abulibdeh *et al.*, 2024; Braun *et al.* 2021; Fogelberg and Wang 2023).

This study adopts a quantitative approach within a post-positivist paradigm to quantify the relationships between cause-related marketing (CRM), consumer purchasing behavior, brand equity, and consumer scepticism in Ghana (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5, RQ6 and RQ7). While acknowledging the complexity of consumer perceptions, a quantitative approach is best suited

for measuring the magnitude and direction of these relationships, testing hypotheses derived from existing theories, and generalizing findings to the broader Ghanaian consumer population. Closed-ended surveys with validated scales were used to collect data, and statistical techniques such as regression and mediation/moderation analysis will be employed to analyze the data and test hypotheses. The post-positivist paradigm acknowledges the potential for bias and subjectivity in research, which is addressed through the use of standardized procedures, validated scales, and statistical controls. While acknowledging the limitations of relying solely on quantitative data, this approach is deemed most appropriate for achieving the study's aims of quantifying relationships, testing hypotheses, and providing generalizable insights for marketing practice and policy in Ghana.

**Table 4.3 Difference Between Primary and Secondary Data**

<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Collection/Analysis Methods</b>	<b>Contribution to Research</b>
Secondary Data	To provide context, inform research design, support the literature review, and contextualize the interpretation of primary data findings within the Ghanaian market.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Academic journal (Marketing, Consumer Research)</li> <li>2. Government publications (Ghana Statistical Service)</li> <li>4. Company reports and websites</li> <li>5. News articles on CRM in Ghana</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Literature reviews and synthesis</li> <li>2. Content analysis of industry reports and company communications</li> <li>3. Statistical analysis of economic and demographic data</li> <li>4. Thematic analysis of news articles to identify key trends.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Theoretical foundation</li> <li>2. Contextual understanding of the Ghanaian market</li> <li>3. Identification of prevalent CRM strategies and challenges in Ghana</li> <li>4. Refining the conceptual model and hypotheses</li> <li>5. Benchmarking and comparison</li> </ol>
Primary Data	To directly address research questions and test hypotheses related to the relationships between CRM, consumer purchasing behavior, brand equity, and skepticism.	Surveys were administered to a representative sample of Ghanaian consumers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Structured questionnaires with Likert scales</li> <li>2. Random sampling techniques</li> <li>3. Data cleaning and coding</li> <li>4. Statistical analysis: Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, mediation and moderation analysis</li> <li>5. Assessment of reliability and validity of scales.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Quantifying the relationships between key variables</li> <li>2. Testing the hypotheses regarding mediation and moderation effects</li> <li>3. Determining the impact of CRM on consumer purchasing behaviour</li> <li>4. Providing empirical evidence specific to the Ghanaian</li> </ol>

				context 5. Assessing the generalizability of findings
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#### 4.6 Research Design

According to Lai et al. (2024) and Saunders et al. (2012), research designs are tactics and mechanisms used in the quest for answers to research questions. Numerous academics and researchers have defined research design. Research design, according to Rassel et al. (2020), is a collection of methods and procedures used to collect and assess variables found in a research topic. Once more, Cooper and Schindler (2008) and Döringer (2021) discovered that although research design is described as a plan outlining how to achieve research goals and outcomes, the phrase lacks a commonly recognised definition.

Three categories of study designs are distinguished by Mulisa (2022) and Creswell (2013): mixed-method, qualitative, and quantitative techniques. The ideal method to employ depends on the study's objective and the research questions, claim Yin (1994) and Kraus et al. (2022). Given this, a quantitative study design was chosen for this study. A research methodology may be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive. Möttus *et al.* (2020) assert that while descriptive research focuses solely on describing the traits of the individuals or group studied, it does not take the study problem's root cause into account. To reduce the time, cost, and other difficulties associated with data collecting, a cross-sectional study approach was adopted (Wang and Cheng 2020; Bethlehem 1999). A cross-sectional study design is chosen to meet the research objectives, given practical constraints and the nature of the research questions. The cross-sectional design was chosen to align with the study's focus on current consumer behaviour post-CRM exposure. While longitudinal tracking could confirm causality, the research prioritizes understanding how CRM campaigns influence brand equity and purchasing behaviour at a single point in time, supported by theoretical frameworks (e.g., Keller's Brand Equity Model). This approach balances efficiency with theoretical rigor, enabling rapid insights into skepticism's moderating role without compromising the study's core objectives.

One kind of study that determines if two different situations are related is called exploratory research, whereas explanatory research, sometimes referred to as causal research, provides additional information and makes a research problem more intelligible, according to Hair, Page and Brunsveld (2019). Research can be conducted using a variety of strategies, such as

exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory techniques. Descriptive research designs aim to provide a comprehensive explanation of a phenomenon by enumerating its characteristics (Siedlecki 2020). When a researcher wishes to understand current relationships or conditions and provide an accurate picture of them, he or she will use a descriptive research design (Asenahabi 2019). When a researcher seeks to understand a subject better, formulate hypotheses, gain new insights, and learn more about it, they use an exploratory research design (Swedberg, 2020; Žukauskas et al., 2018). When a researcher wants to establish causal linkages between variables and understand the impact of one variable on another, he or she uses an explanatory research design. It does more than merely describe or examine relationships to establish cause-and-effect links (Krichene and Baklouti 2021). However, in line with Echeverria *et al.* (2018), this thesis used an explanatory research design. An explanatory research design is crucial for this study because it goes beyond merely describing the relationship between cause-related marketing (CRM) and consumer purchasing behavior. It aims to explain how and why CRM influences purchasing decisions, with a specific focus on the mediating role of brand equity and the moderating role of consumer scepticism, and lastly aligns with the study's objectives.

#### **4.7 Research Instrument Design**

A structured questionnaire was utilised to assess constructs using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The study items used to assess the components were adapted from previously published studies. On a five-point Likert scale, 1 represented "strongly disagree," 2 represented "disagree," 3 represented "neutral," and 4 represented "agree." The study of consumers' comprehension and attitudes about CRM was developed by Webb and Mohr (1998). Rifon et al., (2004) provided an adaptation for evaluating customers' attributions of business motives. The study modified the findings of Ćorić and Dropuljić (2015) and Ross, Patterson, and Stutts (1992) regarding the impact of CRM on consumer purchasing behaviour.

Customer scepticism was adapted from Brønn and Vrioni (2001) and Mimouni Chaabane and Praguél (2016), patronage intention or purchasing behaviour was adapted from Westberg and Pope (2014) and Walker et al. (2010), and the mediating role of BE on the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour (dimensions of BE) was established from Uslu, Durmuş, and Kolivar (2013). Because it is quicker and easier for responders to answer than

open-ended questions, a five-point Likert scale was utilised (Zimba and Gasparyan 2023; Leung 2011). The appropriate measurement scale for this study is ordinal because it measures the volume of responses, opinions, or thoughts provided by the respondents. It enables the researcher to determine how closely one object resembles another subject.

Since it involves creating tools or instruments for data gathering, research instrument design is a crucial stage in the research process. The sort of data needed, the study technique, and the nature of the research questions all influence the research instrument's design. The current thesis collected data using a structured questionnaire. The study chose self-administered questionnaires because of their intrinsic confidentiality, which encourages participants to give truthful and direct responses (van der Valk, Aizpurua, and Rogan 2022; Bernardi and Nash 2023). To make respondents feel more at ease, the survey's opening questions were, for instance, simplified, and suggestions for an appropriate survey design were taken into account (Griffin *et al.*. 2021; Trochim and Donnelly 2007).

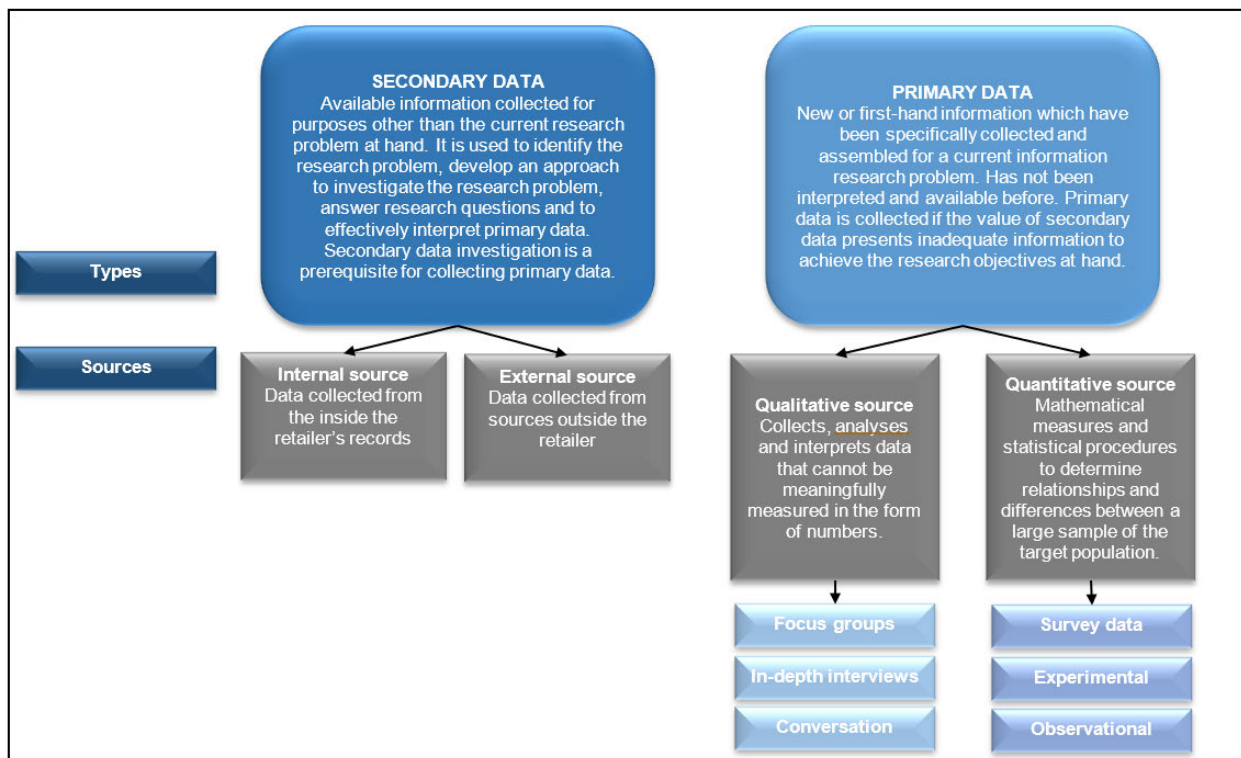
There were two sections to the research tool. While the questions in Section B concentrate on the main ideas employed in the thesis, such as CRM, BE, consumer scepticism, and consumer purchasing behaviour, the demographic questions in Section A are specific to the respondents. With BE serving as a mediator and consumer scepticism as a moderator, a 5-point Likert scale—1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree"—was used to gauge respondents' perceptions of the claims made in Section B about how CRM affects customer purchasing behaviour. To lessen the time, expense, and other difficulties of the data collection procedure, the study used a cross-sectional research methodology (Wang and Cheng 2020; Bethlehem 1999; Haseeb et al. 2019; Mann 2003). This entails collecting the data for analysis just once.

#### **4.8 Sources of Data**

In research, the two primary data streams that can be utilised are primary and secondary data. Data that already exists and can be retrieved from sources that have been stored is known as secondary data. The type of data that a researcher must collect directly from the field population is called primary data. To obtain primary data, the researcher must try to gain information from the specified target population. Data can be distinguished between secondary data and primary data, each with numerous sources (Burns et al., 2017:72). Figure 4.2 briefly depicts the various types of data and the sources thereof, followed by a brief explanation regarding the types of

data used for this study.

**Figure 4.2: Types of data**



Source: Adapted from Babin and Zikmund (2016) and Burns *et al.* (2017).

As indicated in Figure 6.2, secondary data refers to existing information gathered for a different purpose than the progressing research problem. Secondary data research is a requirement for gathering primary data (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2015:140). It includes internal and external sources (Burns *et al.*, 2017:119). Internal sources include data collected from inside the organisation's records, such as sales records, invoices, and internal databases. External sources include data collected from outside the organisation, such as articles, business source directories, encyclopaedias, and marketing directories (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

Figure 6.2 further indicates that primary data refers to first-hand new data specifically gathered to investigate a research problem at hand. Primary data is unavailable and has not been interpreted before. If secondary data offers inadequate information to reach the set research objectives, then primary data is collected (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:163). Primary data includes two research methods: qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research

refers to the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that cannot be meaningfully measured in the form of numbers. Preliminary insights into the research problem are acquired from qualitative research since this type of research is gathered with small samples (Burns et al., 2017:144). However, the non-statistical nature and small sample size make it challenging to generalise research findings (Burns et al., 2017:144), thus making this method suitable when the research objective is not precise (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:163). Quantitative research includes the use of statistical processes and mathematical procedures to determine differences and relationships concerning a large sample of the population. In addition, quantitative research uses a set of structured questions with predetermined response options (Burns et al., 2017:143). Quantitative research is suitable to test theories, models, and hypotheses to describe respondents' behaviour and offer an understanding of the emotional, motivational, and attitudinal realities influencing such behaviour (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:163). Table 6.4 presents the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods.

**Table 4.4: Main differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods**

Characteristic	Qualitative	Quantitative
<b>Goal</b>	To discover research objectives and ideas of causal problems and motives.	To test research questions or hypotheses and make generalisations from the sample results to the population of interest.
<b>Technique</b>	Observing respondents and interpreting results.	Measure respondents and test results.
<b>Data collection method</b>	Open-ended and unstructured.	Structured categories.
<b>Involvement of the researcher</b>	The researcher is highly involved, causing subjective results.	The researcher's involvement is limited, causing objective results.
<b>Sample</b>	Small samples in natural settings.	Large samples whereby results can be generalised.
<b>Research design</b>	Exploratory	Descriptive and Explanatory
<b>Analysis of data</b>	Continuous data analyses during data collection with non-statistical methods.	Data analysis is done after data collection with statistical methods.

Source: Adapted from Babin and Zikmund (2016:111).

For this study, both secondary and primary data were collected. External sources of secondary data were collected based upon information acquired from published academic articles in accredited journals to provide the literature review underpinning this study. Primary data was collected since data for the specific research problem is not available, even though primary data is expensive and time-consuming to collect (Malhotra, 2010:132). This study collected quantitative data to statistically analyse and test the hypothesis of this study through numerical values (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:111). As shown in Table 6.4, quantitative data were further collected because it has an objective nature, the researcher's involvement is limited, and they allow the researcher to include large samples, which consequently produces generalised results. Furthermore, an explanatory research design generally uses primary data, as the data collection research methods associated with this type of research design are quantitative and structured in nature (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:99), which were used in this study. Also, quantitative data is analysed with statistical methods, which is necessary for this study since hypotheses are statistically tested. Lastly, it is reasonable to argue that for this study, primary quantitative data was collected since a prerequisite for quantitative data collection is that precise information for the study should be established (Burns *et al.*, 2017:144). As such, the researcher conducted a thorough literature review supporting the precise information needed to achieve the research objective for this study.

#### **4.9 Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher was aware of the value of research design tools for this investigation. Only respondents from the chosen shopping malls who could read and comprehend its clarity were given the structured questionnaire, which was created based on the suggested model in Chapter 3. Since primary data represents data that is currently being collected and reflects the respondents' opinions or the current situation regarding the concept under study, its use enhances the study's validity and reliability. This study relies on primary sources of data with a questionnaire as the main research instrument. Closed-ended questionnaire (Bananuka, 2019) was deployed in this study. The questionnaire was thoughtfully created to address the study's goals. Data gathering methods include the Internet, postal service, hand delivery, and questionnaire collection (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). This study used manual delivery and collection methods in addition to the Internet. Since most respondents were hesitant to fill out the surveys online or by mail, hand delivery was chosen as the method of collecting and distribution since it encouraged prompt and truthful responses.

The questionnaire took participants a little more than twenty minutes to complete. The completed questionnaire was returned not later than three weeks from the day of distribution. The study was restricted to shopping malls in Takoradi and Accra, which are cosmopolitan cities because of the presence of individuals from all of the country's major regions, making the findings generalizable. A total of 565 structured questionnaires were received out of 620 that were issued. This indicates that 55 surveys were either not returned or received. Out of the valid responses obtained, the offline technique produced 500 responses, whereas the online strategy produced 65. 65 of the completed questionnaires contained certain anomalies that made them unusable for data processing and analysis, according to an examination of the gathered questionnaires. Both nominal and ordinal were deployed in the measurement scales, as well as the application of the five-point Likert measurement scale.

Consequently, 500 valid responses were employed in the data processing and analysis, which amounts to 88.50% of the total valid responses received after excluding incomplete, duplicate, and inconsistent responses from some of the completed surveys. According to Mahmoud et al. (2021) and Bhattacharjee (2012), one disadvantage of employing a questionnaire is the transmission of research surveys via email and postal mail; however, because the majority of the questionnaire was filled out offline or in person, the researcher was able to circumvent this problem. According to Feng et al. (2021) and Conrad et al. (2022), filling out questionnaires might be challenging when the information is complex or hard to understand. The period of the survey was between four and six weeks.

#### **4.10 Population**

According to Leavy (2017), a population is a collection of elements about which you may subsequently make assertions. A population, according to Kumar (2011) and Hunziker and Blankenagel (2024), is the total set of persons that the researcher hopes to locate to avoid the research phenomena. Research is carried out for the betterment of the population, and the population chosen for the research approach is chosen based on shared qualities or characteristics (Laurentin Táriba, 2023; Saunders et al., 2012). A research population, according to Lehdonvirta et al. (2021) and O'Hanlon (2011), is the total number of people or things that a researcher samples to reach a logical conclusion or findings about the study. The general consumers in Ghana, estimated at thirty million eight hundred and thirty (30, 0830) as per the report of Ghana Statistical Service 2021, were the study's target demographics.

In this study, consumers from selected shopping malls who are educated (age between 18-55) constituted the study population. The reason for this is that better-educated consumers are more knowledgeable and supportive of CRM initiatives than uneducated consumers (Casalegno, Candelo and Santoro 2022; Prieto-Sandoval, Torres-Guevara and García-Díaz 2022; Tanford, Kim and Kim 2020; Chang and Cheng 2015). Additionally, it has been discovered that millennials worldwide are more concerned with funding businesses that support pertinent social causes (Deb and Amawate 2020). Given the above, the demographic age was between 18 and 55. Such a population seeks to help the researcher obtain more useful, precise data and findings. The study sampled consumers aged 18–55 years across urban shopping malls in Accra (Greater Accra region) and Takoradi (Western region), Ghana. The age range was divided into two subgroups: 18–39 years (capturing Millennials born 1981–1996, aged 28–43 in 2024) and 40–55 years (early middle age). This segmentation allows for a nuanced analysis of CRM's impact across generations, particularly Millennials, who are digitally engaged and socially conscious. Shopping malls in urban centers reflect high foot traffic and exposure to CRM campaigns, ensuring a diverse sample of middle-class consumers.

#### **4.11 Sampling**

The sample is a subset of the population chosen for the research. The selected population segment represents the population as a whole (Baltes and Ralph 2022). According to McDaniel and Gates (2020:282), the sampling method depends on the research objectives, research problem and availability of financial resources. The sampling methods can be broadly classified into either probability sampling or non-probability sampling (Burns et al., 2017:241; Iacobucci and Churchill, 2015:285). Probability sampling involves a procedure where each member of the population has an identical chance of being selected into the sample (Malhotra, 2019:341). However, probability sampling methods require a sampling frame and accurate information about the sampling elements (respondents) before they can be employed (Malhotra, 2019:340). Probability sampling methods include simple random, systematic, stratified, and cluster sampling. To present an accurate and unbiased image of the study, the researcher employed a non-probability sampling approach, particularly convenience sampling.

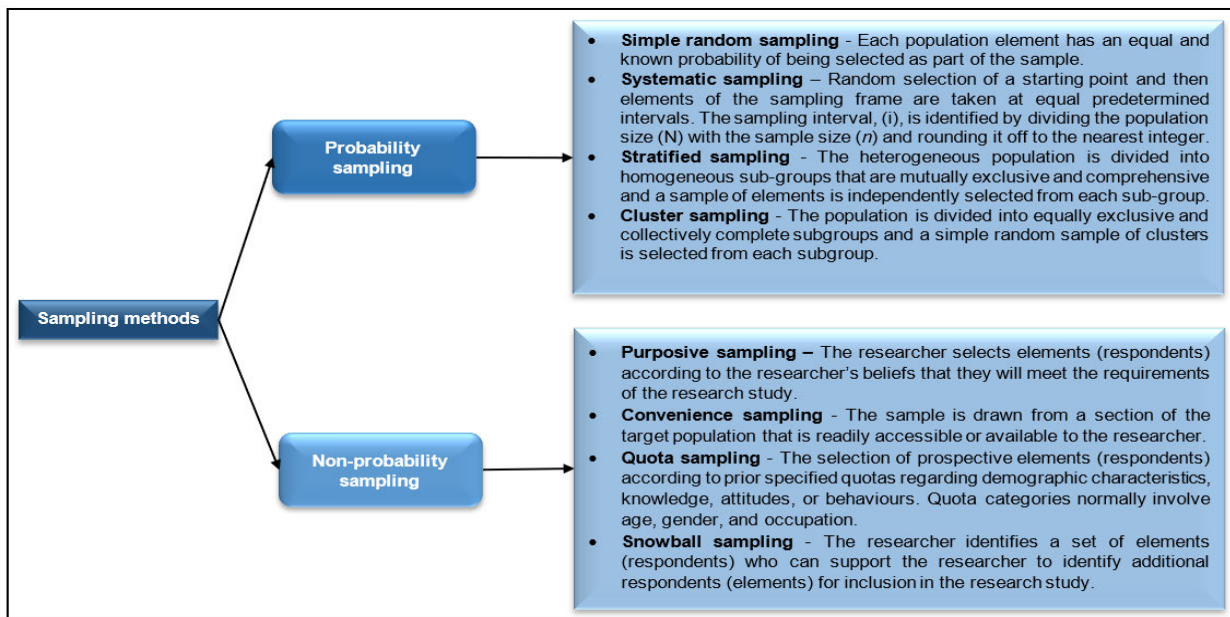
Thus, non-probability sampling was considered for this study since there was no existing, complete list of information containing consumers in the selected cities. As such, the probability of each city consumer being chosen for this study was not unknown, which further

supports this study's use of non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling refers to methods whereby the selection of each sample unit (respondents) has an unknown or predetermined chance of being included in the sample. As such, sampling is random (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:348). With non-probability sampling, guaranteeing that the sample is a representation of the target population is problematic. However, the degree of the target population's representativeness relies on the implemented sampling approach and the execution thereof (Hair *et al.*, 2014:140). Non-probability sampling methods include purposive, convenience, quota, and snowball sampling (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:348).

Convenience sampling, which entails choosing research participants based on their availability to the researcher, was then employed to choose the study's sample (Andrade, 2021; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). To collect data or information from mall patrons, this sampling technique was used (Scholz *et al.*, 2021; Nielsen *et al.*, 2017; Karuhanga, 2010). Convenience sampling's cost-effectiveness and data-gathering efficiency are two significant benefits of quantitative research. By choosing individuals who are easily reachable, convenience sampling enables researchers to collect data rapidly and with few resources. Convenience sampling can yield useful preliminary data that can guide future, more thorough investigations in exploratory research or pilot studies, where the objective is to produce preliminary insights or test hypotheses (Golzar, Miri, and Nazari 2022; Lii and Lee 2012). Convenience sampling's practicality makes it a valuable tool for researchers seeking to quickly and actionably gather insights from their target demographic, despite its limits in terms of generalisability. This method is particularly beneficial in situations where time constraints and budget limitations are significant factors.

The sampling frame refers to a list differentiating the target population sampling elements (respondents) from the units (Burns *et al.*, 2017:73). Although there is no complete list containing the consumers of shopping malls in Ghana, the researcher used reliable research by the Ghana Statistical Service report on consumers. This report assisted the researcher in ensuring the rightful number of respondents. Thus, respondents who reside in the Greater Accra and Takoradi cities were only included in the study. Each sampling method (probability and non-probability) and the types of sampling approaches for each are presented in Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3: Sampling methods**



Source: Adapted from Burns et al. (2017) and Hair et al. (2017).

#### 4.12 Sample Size Determination

According to Braun and Clarke (2021) and Malhotra (2012), the sample size is the total number of individuals selected from a community or group to collect data. A study that has a bigger sample size is better because of the correlation between the research findings and the sample size (Lakens 2022; Hennink and Kaiser 2022; Braun and Clarke, 2021). Finding the right sample size for a research project is a challenging undertaking, according to Crick (2021). When a researcher has access to subjects within a specific institution, organisation, business, group, etc., they frequently employ the convenience sampling technique. This study aimed to sample 620 people in total using the Slovenian formula from 1960 (Tejada and Punzalan 2012). A reliable sample of 500 responders was selected from this.

According to Asempapa (2022), the study's target population consisted of Ghana's anticipated 30.8 million mall patrons. Using Slovin's 1960 formula, the study calculated the sample size.

$$\text{Solvin's Formula } n = \frac{N}{(1+N \cdot e^2)}$$

$n$  = sample size;  $N$  = total population; and  $e$  = margin of error. The study used a 95% confidence level to estimate the sample size. The margin of error is therefore 5%.

$$\frac{30,0830}{(1+30,0830 \times 0.05^2)} = 400.$$

The sample size in this study was 500 respondents, which is more than the minimum sample

size. Rashid et al. (2021) and Hair *et al.* (2008) state that a quantitative research sample should have at least 300 respondents; therefore, the sample size in this study, which was 500 respondents, is in line with the estimate made by Hair *et al.* (2008).

A higher sample size is preferable, according to Braun and Clarke (2021). Burns, Bush, and Sinha (2014) and Lakens (2022) discovered a relationship between the research findings and the sample size. The sample size restricts how many variables the researcher may look at in total without compromising the representation of the population. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) and Malhotra (2012) point out that determining the sample size for a population is challenging; however, Haritha and Uchil (2020) and Tejada and Punzalan (2012), applying Slovin's (1960) method, results in a precise sample size for this kind of research.

#### **4.13 Data Editing, Coding, Screening, and Entry**

The significance of data entry, screening, coding, and editing was recognised by the researcher. Data must go through editing, coding, filtering, and entering procedures before analysis can commence. (Hemmler *et al.* 2022; Locke, Feldman and Golden-Biddle 2022). All data must always be recorded using codes, which speeds up data entry. The researcher first entered all of the data into an Excel spreadsheet and coded it to see if it was correctly coded. The screening and coding process is meant to help the researcher eliminate any missing data, correct any errors discovered throughout the process, and eliminate inputs that could distort the research conclusions (Woods *et al.*, 2024). Once the data was in Excel format, the researcher entered it using the partial least squares and structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) tool.

#### **4.14 Data Analysis**

The researcher employed PLS-SEM as the data analysis method. The structural equations modelling (SEM) statistical approach uses a variety of statistical approaches, computer algorithms, and mathematical models to fit the network of constructs to the data. The statistical link between measurable variables and latent constructs is examined using multivariate statistical analysis techniques like SEM. With the help of this analysis method, it is possible to estimate the various interrelated dependencies. Since the method may infer the relationship between invisible constructs (latent variables) from observable variables, it is particularly helpful in the social science sector. The study involved both descriptive and inferential statistical studies. The data analysis procedure was carried out using the statistical software SPSS version 25 and PLS-SEM version 3.3.

SEM was employed to test theories. It is helpful because it can indicate multiple direct and indirect relationships between independent and dependent variables at the same time (Sarstedt *et al.* 2020). Hair *et al.* (2021) claim that SEM may also make adjustments and measure error variance (Zang, Dawson, and Kline, 2021; Chakraborty and Bhat, 2017). Additionally, it is capable of measuring the correlations between observable and latent variables directly.

#### 4.15 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measurement scale in producing similar results across repeated applications of the same variable (Hair *et al.*, 2013:165). It reflects the degree to which a measure is free from random error, ensuring data accuracy (Burns *et al.*, 2017:215; Malhotra, 2010:318). Reliability is the ability of a measurement instrument or procedure to consistently give individuals or objects with similar values the same score. According to Clemente *et al.* (2022) and Patterson, Whelan, and Worth (2021), reliability is the extent to which one can predict roughly continuous deviation scores of individuals across testing settings on the same or similar testing devices. Reliability is assessed by evaluating scale variation across applications. Internal consistency (via Cronbach’s alpha) and composite reliability (via SEM) are used to ensure items measure the same construct. Internal consistency reliability evaluates item correlations to confirm they measure the same construct. Cronbach’s alpha averages split-half coefficients, with  $\geq 0.7$  indicating reliability. However, it assumes equal item reliability and is influenced by scale length.

As such, composite reliability assesses true reliability and internal consistency through SEM, by which equal indicator loadings are not accepted. Therefore, the downfall of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is made up by composite reliability (Peterson and Kim, 2013:194). As mentioned above, the composite reliability values should range between 0 and 1, where 1 indicates perfect reliability and 0 indicates no reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2017:111). However, to be considered reliable, values should be 0.7 or higher (Hair *et al.*, 2010:709). Typically, values that are below this cut-off are unreliable, and the researcher must remove them from the study. Hence, this requirement is used to assess the measurement scales in this study, as shown in Table 6.12.

**Table 4.5: Reliability cut-off values**

Applicable assessment	Recommended cut-off point
Internal consistency reliability	>0.7

Composite reliability	>0.7
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For this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient values were calculated for the data collected from the pilot study to confirm the internal consistency reliability and whether the measurement scale items are correlated (Hair *et al.*, 2017:112). In terms of composite reliability, values were calculated for the data collected from thirty respondents. Furthermore, composite reliability was done before construct validity was determined (Hair *et al.*, 2014:619). According to Hair, Page, and Brunsveld (2019), all constructs must have composite reliability scores between 0.70 and 0.95 to satisfy the requirements.

#### 4.16 Validity

Validity refers to the accuracy of a measuring scale, whether the questionnaire did measure what it is supposed to measure and truly signifies a construct, theory, or model (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:281; Burns *et al.*, 2017:215). Gregory (1992) defined validity as "the extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure." A measure is deemed legitimate if it correctly measures the desired result and does so without unintentionally including irrelevant variables. A test's face validity, which is a judgment we make based on common sense, indicates how well it assesses what it intended to measure. Three scholars discussed the questionnaire to determine each issue's specificity, clarity, and representativeness (Leavy 2017). Hair *et al.*, (2014:618, 619) identify two approaches to assess for validity, namely convergent and discriminant validity. These are subsequently discussed and were used to assess the validity of the constructs in this study.

Convergent validity examines the interrelationships between related constructs that is the degree to which the measurement scale items positively correlate with other items in the same construct (Hair *et al.*, 2017:112; Malhotra, 2010:321). This indicates that the items are related when measuring a construct. Convergent validity relies on internal consistency reliability, thus high reliability scales usually produce convergent validity (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:283). When testing for convergent validity, Hair *et al.* (2014:618) suggests that the researcher investigates high factor loadings of the measurement scale items which are statistically significant. Confirmatory factor analysis calculates factor loadings (Hair *et al.*, 2014:618). The cut-off for standardised factor loadings in convergent validity is 0.50, but preferably 0.70 and higher, as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2014:618).

Therefore, for this study, if the factor loadings were statistically significant and 0.70 or more, the measurement scale is indeed measuring the proposed construct and the items will be retained for additional analysis (Hair et al., 2014:618). In addition to factor loadings, Hair et al. (2014:618) specify that average variance extracted (AVE) can be examined to test for convergent validity. AVE is calculated as the mean squared multiple correlations with the mean sum of each variable divided by the number of factors in that variable (Hair et al., 2014:619). The cut-off for an AVE value is 0.50 or higher which indicates adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014:619). For this study, the measurement scale's AVE is calculated by performing a confirmatory factor analysis, which is discussed in section 6.4.6.3 (sub-section iv stage 4). Lastly, convergent validity is confirmed through construct reliability which measures the degree to which the questionnaire adequately comprises the objectives of this study (Malhotra, 2010:320; Hair et al., 2014:619).

Discriminant validity examines the relationships between constructs that are unrelated i.e., the degree to which a construct is distinct from the other constructs incorporated in the study (Babin and Zikmund, 2016:283). According to Farrel (2010:330), discriminant validity should be assessed by using the Fornell-Larcker measure. This measure confirms the AVE of each construct are more than the squared correlation estimates between each pair of constructs. As such, discriminant validity is calculated by the variance extracted which should be more than the squared correlation estimate (Hair et al., 2017:111). This procedure was followed to assess discriminant validity in this study, as shown in Table 6.13.

**Table 4.6: Validity cut-off values**

Applicable assessment		Recommended cut-off point
Convergent validity	Standardised factor loadings	>0.7
	Average variance extracted (AVE)	>0.5
	Construct reliability	>0.7
Discriminant validity	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Variance extracted should be more than the squared correlation estimate

For this study, the pilot study of the questionnaire ensured that the questionnaire was relevant and applicable to the objectives of this study. The structural relationship between the different constructs can be ambiguous in the absence of evidence confirming the measurement integrity of scales. In addition, convergent and discriminant validity were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (section 6.4.6.3 sub-section iv stage 4). Convergent validity was assessed by examining the measurement scales in the questionnaire, and a confirmatory factor analysis in

an SEM framework was performed on the measurement scales measuring the constructs of this study, i.e., if the corresponding items' load on the factor (Hair et al., 2017:111). A five-factor model comprising the exterior, interior, layout and design, point of purchase and decoration, and human variable will be used. Moreover, a second-order construct will be created, store atmospherics, which captures the shared variance of all five first-order latent factors for additional analyses. Furthermore, an alpha coefficient value technique will be used to evaluate internal consistency reliability between different items in a measurement scale (Malhotra, 2019:319).

#### **4.17 Hypothesis Testing**

The population being studied is the subject of the hypotheses. Hypotheses are tested to determine whether the sample's empirical data supports the statement about the population or not. Quarfoot and Rabin (2022) and Sayed and Auret (2023) define a hypothesis as a testable claim or a conjectural declaration regarding the relationship between two variables. The expression of the null and alternative hypotheses, the choice of the significance level, the computation of the test statistic, the creation of the decision rule, and the validation and option selection are the four fundamental steps in testing or validating hypotheses. SMART PLS (Partial Least Squares) is a variance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) technique used to analyze relationships between latent variables. It is particularly suited for studies with complex models, small-to-moderate sample sizes, or non-normal data distributions (Hair et al., 2017). Using Smart PLS 3.3, the partial least squares (PLS) approach was used to assess the measurement model. The variance-based PLS-SEM method was their choice. The cut-off of Composite Reliability (CR):  $\geq 0.7$  (Hair et al., 2017), Average Variance Extracted (AVE):  $\geq 0.5$  (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and, Discriminant Validity: Square root of AVE > inter-construct correlations (Fornell-Larcker criterion).

It is possible to test the measurement and structural models using the PLS technique. Hair *et al.* (2017) used PLS-SEM to evaluate the variance of the intrinsic causes of the components based on the associated manifest variables and the proposed theoretical model. Because PLS-SEM shows a correlation that is similar to the conventional regression coefficients, it is a helpful technique for investigating moderation effects. The present study modelled each component as a reflecting indicator. PLS-SEM was performed using software known as Smart PLS 3.3 (Ringle, Da Silva, and Bido 2015). Facilitating the definition of the variables and their interactions was the aim of the structural model. The measuring model for the constructs was

initially assessed for validity, reliability, and discriminant validity to illustrate the connections among the elements (Hair *et al.* 2017). To determine whether these correlations were significant, we examined the standardised pathways. We used the bootstrap calculation method to find these pathways.

#### **4.18 Pilot Study**

Pilot studies are small-scale, preparatory investigations carried out before the major research project to assess and improve the research strategy, approach, and methodologies (Malmqvist *et al.* 2019; Fraser *et al.* 2018). A pilot study's major goal is to find and fix any possible problems or difficulties that might come up during the main study to ensure the viability and efficacy of the research strategy. Before delivering the questionnaire to participants, the researcher has just one chance to refine the instrument; therefore, pretesting is essential to achieving the best results (Greener and Martelli 2018). The pretesting results were utilised whenever feasible to make changes to the research study that would prevent any unfavourable outcomes. The initial data collection sample did not include the 30 target population participants chosen for the pilot project.

The Cronbach alpha values for the pilot study are as follows: Brand Equity (0.807), CRM (0.815), Consumer Scepticism (0.815), and Consumer Purchase Behaviour (0.802). The questions underwent two rounds of pretesting. In the first step, the questions and assertions were evaluated by experts to make sure there were no unanswered questions. To accomplish each goal, the experts had to decide if the nature of the items was suitable for extracting the necessary information. As a result, the primary co-supervisors independently offered their professional judgement regarding the measures' face validity. As part of the second round of pretesting to refine the items, a subset of shopping malls received the final questionnaires.

#### **4.19 Ethical Considerations**

According to Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014), ethics can be characterised as a collection of predetermined standards for behaviour. According to the authors, the most important ethical agreements governing social research are those about safeguarding confidentiality and anonymity, not misleading research subjects, and engaging willingly and without causing harm to participants. The researcher obtained participants' informed consent to ensure voluntary participation to guarantee adherence to the aforementioned.

Participants received assurances of their privacy. This is consistent with Griffin *et al.* (2021)

and Thompson and Warzel (2022), who contend that to maintain anonymity, the data that participants submit should not in any way disclose who they are. All data, including printed transcripts and electronic data, will be stored in encrypted files or a secure location for five years after this study is published. Following that, all files will be destroyed following DUT ethical rules. Only DUT and the researcher would be able to access the information. The researcher's laptop will house the electronically created data, which will be password-protected so that only the researcher may access it.

#### **4.20 Conclusion**

A thorough rundown of the research process was given in the methodology chapter, which covered study design, demographics, objectives, sample selection, instruments, data collecting, analysis techniques, ethics, and pre-testing. Research philosophies, specifically ontology, epistemology, and axiology, which influenced the research methodology, were the next topics of discussion. There were descriptions of the data gathering tool and the data analysis technique. To investigate CRM, BE, consumer scepticism, and purchasing behaviour among Ghanaian consumers, the study generally uses a rigorous quantitative method, utilising structured questionnaires, PLS-SEM analysis, and ethical concerns. The results and data analysis are presented in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter covered the following topics: demographics, study objectives, population, sample, sampling strategy, instruments, data collection processes, data analysis methodologies, ethical issues, and pre-testing of the data collection tools. This chapter summarises the study's findings and data analysis. The study looked into CRM and how it relates to consumer buying patterns. It found that CRM is a strategic way for businesses to show their commitment to corporate social responsibility, stand out in the marketplace, and make a positive impact on society while accomplishing their goals.

## **5.2 Descriptive Statistics**

The frequency and percentages of the data on demographics are described by descriptive analysis. The bulk of the 500 responders—258 (51.60%)—were female, while 242 (48.40%) were male. The findings on age revealed that the largest group was less than 30 years of age (152,30.40%), followed by age 41-50 years of age 148 (, 29.60%), 31-40 years of age (102 20.40%), and, lastly, above 51years (98, 19.60%).

The findings revealed that 189 (37.80%) of the respondents were tertiary students, followed by 147 (29.40%). The number of respondents holding senior secondary school education (SSCE) was 89 (17.80%) followed by 75 (15.00%) holding postgraduate certificates. Regarding the respondents' marital status, the majority were unmarried. (202, 40.40%) followed by Other (136, 32.40%) and married (136, 27.20%). The largest group in the employment variable was students (153, 30.60%) followed by unemployed (136, 27.20%), self-employed (109, 21.80%) and workers (102, 20.40%). Finally, the researcher wanted to know the proportion of respondents per shopping mall. The Accra Shopping Mall produced 312 (62.4%) valid responses and Takoradi Shopping Mall 188 (37.60%).

## **5.3 Assessment of Model Appropriateness**

In research methodology, construct validity and reliability are essential ideas, especially in the area of measurement and psychometrics (Mellinger and Hanson 2020; Cheung *et al.* 2023). These ideas are essential for making sure that a study's measurements are reliable,

accurate, and significant. The reliability and validity assessments add to the overall credibility of the findings, demonstrating the consistency and trustworthiness of the data (Rose and Johnson 2020). Table 5.1 presents the results for Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE).

The researcher thoroughly examined the constructs' validity and reliability by utilising Dijkstra-rho Henseler's with Cronbach alpha coefficients, drawing inspiration from academic studies that employ PLS-SEM application (Hair et al. 2017; Hair, Page, and Brunsveld 2019). Since all of the coefficient values are more than 0.5, Table 5.1 shows the constructions with the highest feasible coefficients (Cheung et al. 2023; Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Hair et al. 2017). We used PLSE-SEM to evaluate the psychometric properties of the supporting items for the research constructs.

However, as indicated in Table 5.1, the lowest and maximum thresholds for the composite dependability of the constructs were 0.7 and 0.8, respectively, exceeding the requirements. Finally, as indicated in Table 4.1, the convergent validity average variance extracted (AVE) was measured with a minimum threshold of 0.5. The AVE is a statistic in SEM that assesses a group of indicators' convergent validity for a latent construct (dos Santos and Cirillo 2023). Convergent validity is the degree of correlation between a construct's indicators. AVE is one way to evaluate this convergent validity (Rönkkö and Cho 2022).

**Table 5.1: Construct reliability and validity**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha (<math>\alpha</math>).</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (rho)</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (rho_C)</b>	<b>Average variance extracted (AVE)</b>
Brand-equity	0.816	0.820	0.856	0.553
CR marketing	0.815	0.823	0.860	0.842
Consumer skepticism	0.966	0.890	0.783	0.768
Consumer purchase Behavior	0.849	0.849	0.883	0.821

Table 4.2 shows the factor loadings and variance inflation factors. Furthermore, the latent constructions' indicator loadings were analysed and successfully loaded into the respective constructs. According to Bollen, Gates, and Luo (2024) and Bagozzi and Yi (1988), a factor loading larger than 0.5 is the most reliable measure/indicator. Data processing removes items that fall below the threshold. The loading for the lowest and maximum loads were 0.522 and 0.752, respectively, showing that they were based on the indicator variable results. Table 5.2 summarises each research component and its accompanying loadings (coefficients). Given the presence of multicollinearity, the researcher used the variance inflation factor to look for indicators of shared method variance among the measurement scales.

The variance inflation factor (VIF) is a statistic used to assess the level of multicollinearity in a regression model. When predictor variables in a regression model have a strong correlation with one another, this is known as multicollinearity, which can cause problems when estimating the precision of the coefficients. The VIF measures how much multicollinearity contributes to the variance of an estimated regression coefficient. A VIF of less than five is usually regarded as acceptable. This implies that the variance of the estimated coefficients is not substantially inflated, and that multicollinearity is not present at a high level. To examine possible shared method variance in the measurement scales and determine whether multicollinearity was present, The VIF numbers show that the researcher used the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).

The researcher determined whether common method variance existed by using studies by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Kock, Berbekova and Assaf (2021). To evaluate the common method variance evidence, the researcher conducted a thorough multicollinearity study, focussing on the VIF. The study's findings show that common technique variance is not an issue because the calculated VIFs (see Table 4.1) fall below the 10-point threshold. (see Alin 2010; Kock and Hadaya 2018; Podsakoff *et al.* 2003; Salmerón *et al.* 2020). In summary, there are not many concerns about common method bias.

**Table 5.2: Construct indicators, loadings, and VIF**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Loadings</b>	<b>VIF</b>
<b>Brand Equity</b>	EMBE1	0.552	1.261
	EMBE3	0.590	1.553
	EMBE4	0.676	1.881
	EMBE5	0.638	1.582
	EMBE6	0.588	1.366
	EMBE7	0.614	1.369
	EMBE8	0.580	1.403
	EMBE9	0.578	1.421
	EMBE10	0.646	1.553
	EMBE11	0.548	1.447
	EMBE12	0.501	1.626
	<b>CR Marketing</b>	CUA1	0.598
CUA2		0.629	1.932
CUA3		0.636	1.324
CUA4		0.604	1.359
CUA5		0.652	1.518
CUA6		0.692	1.654
CUA7		0.754	1.876
CUA8		0.696	1.769
<b>Consumer Scepticism</b>	ECS1	0.522	1.653
	ECS3	0.527	1.556
	ECS4	0.586	1.699
	ECS5	0.640	1.632
	ECS6	0.617	1.896
	ECS8	0.577	2.041
	ECS9	0.610	1.832

<b>Consumer Purchase Behaviour</b>	PIPB1	0.653	1.653
	PIPB2	0.663	1.556
	PIPB3	0.723	1.699
	PIPB5	0.660	1.632
	PIPB6	0.734	1.896
	PIPB7	0.752	2.041
	PIPB8	0.683	1.832
	PIPB9	0.707	1.765

The concept of discriminant validity in research and measurement evaluates how different a measure is from other measures, especially when several constructs are being measured. It ensures that a measurement tool can tell the difference between the construct it is meant to measure and other unrelated constructs. To prove that two or more constructs are different and do not measure the same underlying concept, discriminant validity is essential in the context of psychometrics. It aids researchers in proving that a specific measure is not overly correlated or confused with measures of other constructs. Table 5.3 displays the findings of the discriminant validity test, which were established using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

The AVE estimate should be higher than the correlation shared by the other constructs by the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell-Larcker 1981). Illustrates this. The correlation coefficient level between the observed constructs is obtained from the highlighted slanting figures of the discriminant validity and inter-construct correlation matrix. It is significant to note that every value indicated in bold satisfied the 0.5 minimum threshold. Table 5.3 indicates that a construct is discriminant if the value of its loaded coefficient exceeds the values of every other observed variable in a given row or column. The test verifies that the results are appropriate, enabling the researcher to proceed with additional research into the study. More specifically, Appendix A provides information on the Fornell-Larcker standard and discriminant validity.

**Table 5.3: Discriminant validity, Fornell-Larcker criteria**

Construct	Brand Equity	CR-Marketing	Consumer-Scep	Purchase-Beha
Brand Equity	<b>0.594</b>			
CR-Marketing	0.492	<b>0.659</b>		
Consumer-Scep	0.470	0.374	<b>0.584</b>	
Purchase-Beha	0.673	0.477	0.448	<b>0.698</b>

**5.4 Hypothesis Testing - PLS-SEM**

Path analysis, also known as structural equation modelling, was used to assess the model's fit and show how the research items were causally related. Together with the SEM values obtained using the PLS-SEM version, Table 5.1 shows the path coefficient diagram. Table 4.4 evaluates the significance level of the path coefficients (values) by calculating and displaying t-tests with the relevant significance levels. Additionally, the predictions of the hypothetical structural pathway model show three important predictions about the hypotheses of the current investigation. Table 5.4 provides further details, including the beta ( $\beta$ ) regression coefficients and the significant values (p-values 0.05) for the study model. Also evaluated was the research model's ability to provide values for the regression model. We assessed the prediction power of the research model about the regression model's coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>). The coefficient indicates the extent to which the independent variable (predictor) is responsible for the change in the dependent variable. Thus, the R<sup>2</sup> of Purchase Behaviour and Brand Equity were 49% and 23%, respectively, as shown in Figure 5.1 below and Table 4.4.

**Table 5.4: Hypothetical path coefficient**

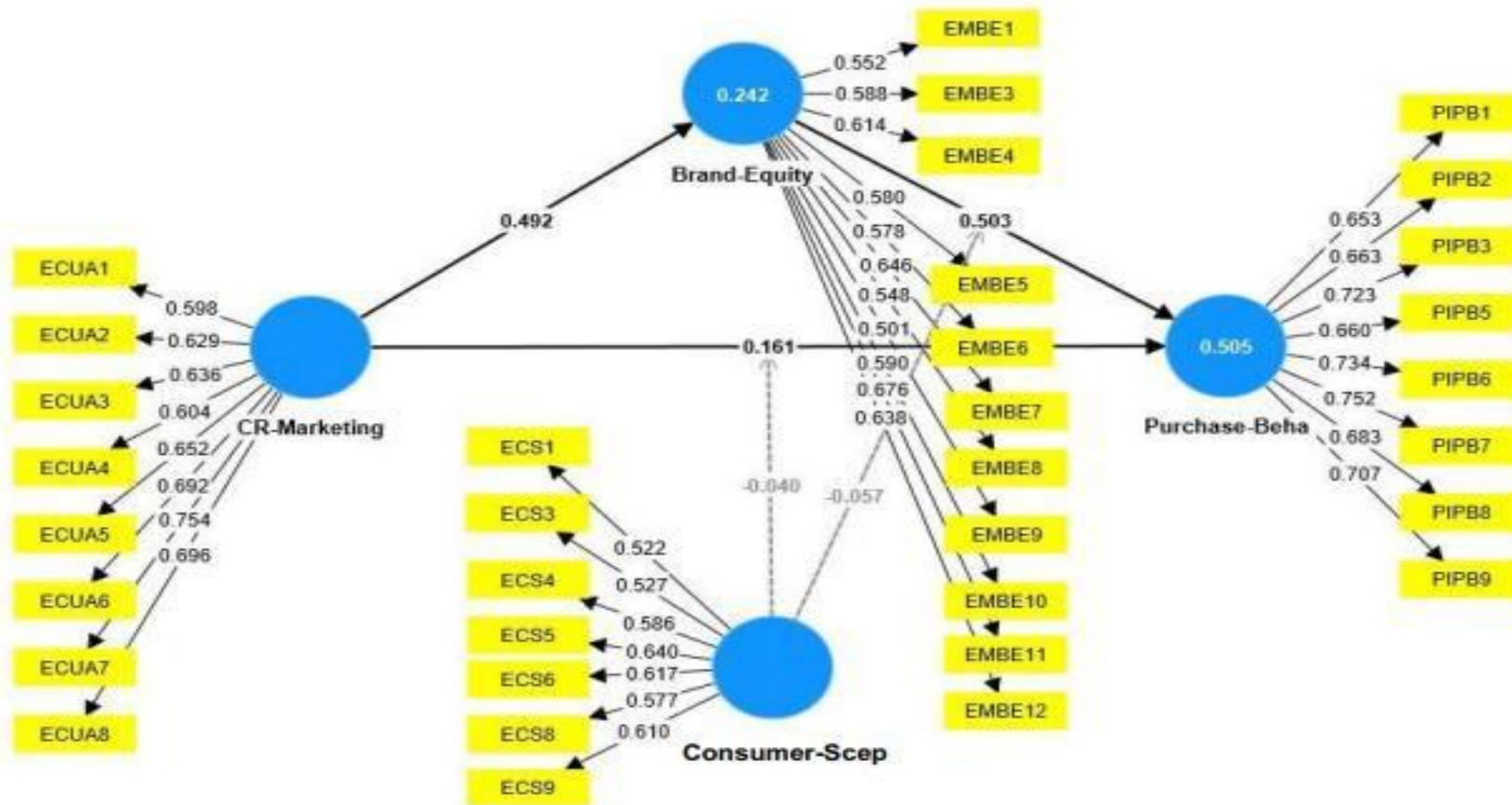
**Standard bootstrap results**

	<b>Original</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>T-</b>	<b>P-</b>	
<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Error</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Brand Equity ->Purch. Beh.	0.503	0.500	0.063	7.946	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
CR Marketing -> Brand Equity	0.492	0.502	0.050	9.761	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
CR Marketing -> Purch. Beh.	0.161	0.161	0.054	2.972	0.003	<b>Accept</b>

Brand	Equity	->	CR				
Marketing -> Purch. Beh.	0.133	0.142	0.047	2.792	0.005	<b>Accept</b>	
Con Scep -> Brand Equity -						<b>Not</b>	
>Purch. Beh	-0.057	-0.068	0.050	1.128	0.259	<b>Accept</b>	
Con Scep -> CR Marketing						<b>Not</b>	
>Purch. Beh	-0.040	-0.033	0.054	0.749	0.454	<b>Accept</b>	

Construct	Coefficient of determination (R <sup>2</sup> )	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Brand Equity	0.242	0.239
Purchase Behaviour	0.505	0.497

Figure 5.1: Estimated research model



## 5.5 Cohen $f^2$ and Interpretations

The effect size of a structural model is represented by Cohen's f-squared ( $f^2$ ). By analysing the change in  $R^2$  with the removal of any exogenous (independent) variable from a model, it calculates the contribution of that variable. (Cohen 1988). If the change in  $R^2$  is substantial, it indicates that the omitted exogenous variable significantly impacts the endogenous constructs (dependent variables). Cohen's criteria state that small, medium, and considerable impacts of the exogenous variable are indicated by  $f^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, respectively (Cohen 1988; Correll et al. 2020).

The ability of Cohen's  $f^2$  to help researchers assess whether an intervention or experimental manipulation has an effect larger than zero and quantify the magnitude of that effect is one of its key features (Lakens 2013; Selya et al. 2012). Researchers can evaluate the practical value of their findings beyond statistical significance by computing  $f^2$ , which offers important insights into the study's practical implications.

### 5.5.1 Interpretation of Cohen's $f^2$

Cohen's f-squared ( $f^2$ ) serves as a measure of effect size in structural models, allowing researchers to evaluate the impact of exogenous (independent) variables. When an exogenous variable is removed from a model, the change in  $R^2$  is calculated. A significant change indicates that the variable plays a critical role in the model, while a minimal change indicates that its contribution is relatively minor (Cohen 1988). In mathematical terms,  $f^2$  can be expressed as follows:

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2_{\text{included}} - R^2_{\text{excluded}}}{1 - R^2_{\text{included}}}$$

Cohen's f-squared ( $f^2$ ) serves as a measure of effect size within a structural model, quantifying the influence of an exogenous (independent) variable on the model's outcomes. The calculation of  $f^2$  involves evaluating the change in the  $R^2$  value when a certain exogenous variable is debarred from the model. A significant alteration in  $R^2$  indicates that the removed variable has a meaningful impact on the model, whereas a minimal change suggests a lesser contribution

from that variable (Cohen 1988). Cohen's guidelines classify  $f^2$  values as follows: a small effect size is indicated by values less than or equal to 0.02; a medium effect size is indicated by values between 0.02 and 0.15; and a large effect size is indicated by values of 0.35 or above. The exogenous variable is not considered to be a contributor to the model when its  $f^2$  value is 0.00. Table 5.4 provides a summary of the structural model, with the pertinent estimates shown in the last column. For instance, Table 5.4 demonstrates a statistically significant link between BE and purchasing behaviour, with a p-value of less than 0.05. The exogenous variable BE does have a discernible impact on purchasing behaviour, however the effect size is substantial, according to Cohen's  $f^2$  coefficient of 0.311.

Likewise, the correlation between CRM and BE has a Cohen's  $f^2$  of 0.319, indicating that the exogenous variable (BE) significantly influences the endogenous variable (CRM) in the overall model. As shown in Table 5.4, the link between BE and CRM has a significant p-value of 0.000, which supports this relationship. The association between the path model and Cohen's  $f^2$  for various independent and dependent variables is further detailed in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 below.

**Table 5.5: Effect size**

Constructs	f-square
Brand-Equity -> Purchase-Beha	0.311
CR-Marketing -> Brand-Equity	0.319
CR-Marketing -> Purchase-Beha	0.037
Consumer-Scep -> Purchase-Beha	0.027
Consumer-Scep x Brand-Equity -> Purchase-Beha	0.005
Consumer-Scep x CR-Marketing -> Purchase-Beha	0.003

## 5.6 Discussion of the Study Hypotheses

### 5.6.1 H1: There is a significant relationship between brand equity and consumer purchase behaviour

According to H1, BE will significantly impact consumer purchasing decisions. This hypothesis was valid ( $p = 0.000$ , Table 5.4), and the outcome was consistent with previous research (Koapaha and Tumiwa 2016; Haxhialushi and Panajoti 2018; Karulkar et al. 2019; Ahmed 2020). Karulkar et al. (2019), for example, discovered that BE has a major impact on customer preferences and buying decisions. According to the study, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand connotations, and brand loyalty all have a major impact on consumer preferences and decisions. (Tran, Wen, and Taylor, 2023). According to Haxhialushi and Panajoti (2018), the most significant element of BE in the FMCG sector is brand loyalty. This was corroborated by Karulkar et al. (2019), who discovered that in the mobile phone sector, perceived quality had the most influence on purchase intention, followed by brand awareness and loyalty.

In essence, people are more likely to purchase from brands with great equity and to pay premium pricing. By illustrating the connections between BE and brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, Ahmed (2020) went beyond this. The idea was further supported by Chen (2022) and Majeed, Owusu-Ansah, and Ashmond (2021), who discovered that purchase intention was substantially impacted by BE and brand image. The findings also showed that customers had higher purchase intentions and were more willing to pay extra for goods linked to well-known brands.

Brand equity fosters brand loyalty and encourages repeat purchases among consumers. As demonstrated by Aaker (1992) and Nuseir (2022), brand loyalty plays a critical component in customer-based BE. In other words, happy customers are more likely to be loyal to a brand and make more purchases, which helps the business succeed in the long run. Consistent with the results, other studies have also demonstrated how pervasiveness influences BE across various industries and product categories (Goyal and Verma 2024; Shaalan *et al.* 2022; Koapaha and Tumiwa 2016; Haxhialushi and Panajoti 2018). Regardless of the industry (e.g. consumer goods, technology, automotive, or fashion), strong BE consistently correlates with positive consumer attitudes and behaviours.

As affirmed by Aaker, Biel and Biel (2013), Mafael, Raithel and Hock (2022), and Lim and Guzmán (2022), the importance of managing BE across diverse product markets highlights its impact on consumer perceptions and market share. Other studies also affirmed this proposition and concluded that brands with strong equity enjoy a competitive advantage and are better positioned in the marketplace. Hussain *et al.* (2020a), for instance, conclude that BE serves as a signalling mechanism, reducing consumer uncertainty and perceived risk. This confirms the proposition that strong brands are perceived as trustworthy and credible, allowing firms to outperform competitors and capture market share.

In effect, the literature provides compelling evidence supporting the hypothesis that BE significantly influences consumer purchasing behaviour. As consumers continue to seek brands that resonate with their values and aspirations, the role of brand equity (BE) in shaping consumer preferences and choices remains paramount in contemporary marketing strategies (Anwar, Danial, and Komariah 2022). Brands invest significant resources in building and managing their equity to drive sales, enhance brand loyalty, and maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace.

### **5.6.2 H2: There is a significant relationship between cause-related marketing and brand equity.**

Examining how CRM and BE relate to one another was the second hypothesis. There was acceptance of this hypothesis ( $p = 0.000$ , Table 5.4). Again, this proposition was supported consistently by extant literature (Westberg and Pope 2014; Kurniadin and Mukhsin 2018; Reddy and Sreenivas 2022; Sindhu 2022). Specifically, Reddy and Sreenivas (2022) found a limited impact on BE in the FMCG sector, while Kurniadin and Mukhsin (2018) supported a positive relationship between the two. CRM initiatives often lead to improvements in brand image and perceptions among consumers. By associating themselves with socially responsible causes, firms signal their commitment to making a positive impact beyond profit generation. Customers' opinions of a brand's values, honesty, and social responsibility may improve as a result of this alignment with a cause (Sindhu 2022).

Others (Aggarwal and Singh 2019; Choi and Seo 2019) affirm this proposition highlighting the role of brand loyalty in driving BE, while Kurniadin and Mukhsin (2018) emphasise the importance of integrated marketing communication in enhancing BE. Additionally, Westberg and Pope (2014) emphasised the beneficial correlation between BE and marketing mix

components, especially when it comes to feminine hygiene products. These studies collectively suggest that CRM can indeed significantly influence BE, with the specific mechanisms varying across different industries and product categories.

Additionally, by utilising the cause's emotional relevance, CRM campaigns can increase brand recognition and recall. CRM has the potential to affect customers' responses to the brand {Formatting Citation} since they are more likely to recall and interact with businesses that promote causes they care about. As a result, CRM communications greatly raise consumer brand identification and recall, which raises BE. CRM programs can help a company stand out from the competition and develop a distinctive selling offer. According to Choi and Seo (2019), in a crowded market, companies that show sincere dedication to environmental or social reasons stand out and appeal to customers who care about the environment.

This differentiation can translate into a competitive advantage, as consumers preferentially choose brands that contribute to positive social change (Westberg and Pope 2014; Discua Cruz 2020). As a result, CRM can improve how people perceive a brand's quality and reliability. According to the study's findings, customers view companies that take part in socially conscious activities as more dependable and trustworthy. This validates the literature findings that firms that associate the brand's commitment to a cause with a higher level of product or service quality, generate positive evaluations and higher levels of BE (Kim *et al.* 2023; Ahmad and Guzmán 2021; Pina and Dias 2021).

### **5.6.3 H3: There is a significant influence between cause-related marketing and consumer purchase behaviour**

Investigating the connection between CRM and consumer purchase behaviour was another goal of the study. The hypothesis was supported ( $p = 0.003$ , Table 5.4), with this study finding that cause-related marketing significantly influences consumers' purchasing behaviour. This finding was consistent with the extant literature (Sen, Du and Bhattacharya 2016; Sharma *et al.* 2018; He, Chao and Zhu 2019; Fan *et al.* 2020).

Sen, Du and Bhattacharya (2016) found that CRM initiatives often lead to favourable consumer perceptions and attitudes towards the associated brands. Thus, when companies align themselves with social or environmental causes, consumers perceive them as socially responsible and caring about societal issues. According to a recent Gupta *et al.* (2021) study,

positive perceptions of brands engaged in CRM can influence consumers' purchasing decisions by enhancing brand image and credibility. This means CRM campaigns can evoke emotional responses from consumers by tapping into their values, beliefs, and concerns about social issues.

According to the literature, CRM initiatives can help brands stand out from the competition and develop a distinctive selling proposition. Companies that show sincere dedication to social problems are unique and appeal to customers who care about the environment. Customers are more inclined to select brands linked to social causes, according to this study, giving businesses a competitive edge (Hussain et al. 2020a).

In addition, customers' perceptions of a brand's authenticity and sincerity in supporting social concerns have an impact on their behaviour and purchase intentions. According to this theory, consumers are more inclined to buy goods or services linked to a cause they care about, according to Chin, Isa, and Alodin (2020) and Hussain et al. (2020b). Additionally, Chin, Isa, and Alodin (2020) discovered that customers are more devoted to and prepared to pay more for firms that use CRM. Customers are more inclined to participate in advocacy and good word-of-mouth campaigns when they support brands that use CRM. They might actively support the brand's related cause, tell friends and family about their experiences, and suggest the brand to others. Corroborating these findings, Hussain *et al.* (2020b) highlighted that CRM's consumer advocacy demonstrates how happy customers eventually turn into brand advocates, boosting loyalty and brand recognition.

Thus, empirical data and theoretical frameworks in marketing research support the findings of the hypothesis that CRM influences consumers' purchasing behaviour. CRM initiatives, on the other hand, are essential in influencing the attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of consumers; they also drive advocacy, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions. The implication is that businesses who adopt CRM stand to gain from improved BE, competitive advantage, and enduring customer connections as customers place a greater emphasis on social responsibility and ethical consumption.

#### **5.6.4 H4: Brand equity mediates the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour significantly.**

We examined BE's ability to mediate the link between CRM and customer purchase behaviour. Indicating that BE does moderate the relationship between CRM and customer purchasing behaviour, the hypothesis was supported ( $p = 0.005$ , Table 5.4). This result is in line with previous research (Haxhialushi and Panajoti 2018; Chakraborty 2019). BE stands for a brand's perceived strength and value in the eyes of the public. It includes several elements, including perceived quality, brand connotations, brand loyalty, and brand awareness. According to Haxhialushi and Panajoti (2018), a brand can improve its BE by linking itself to socially conscious endeavours through CRM initiatives, which will, in turn, improve consumer attitudes and perceptions of the brand.

Similarly, Fan *et al.* (2020) and Reddy and Sreenivas (2022) assert that CRM initiatives can enhance BE by creating positive associations between the brand and the social or environmental causes it supports. As a result, customers may view the brand as trustworthy, compassionate, and socially conscious, which could increase brand loyalty and positive sentiments towards the company (Chin, Isa and Alodin 2020). CRM initiatives can differentiate the brand from competitors and foster emotional connections with consumers, contributing to the development of BE.

As emerged from the results, BE mediates the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour by influencing consumer attitudes, preferences, and purchase intentions (Pereira *et al.*, 2024; Kim *et al.*, 2022). In other words, customers are more likely to show higher degrees of brand loyalty and engagement when they have a positive perception of a brand because of its relationship with a cause. This increases the likelihood and frequency of purchases. According to Alinaghian Jouzdani and Yazdan (2024), BE serves as a mediator between the results of CRM initiatives and real consumer purchase behaviour. According to Chakraborty (2019), there are some ways in which BE mediates the relationship between CRM and consumer purchase behaviour. Improved brand recognition, higher perceived value of goods or services, deeper emotional bonds with the brand, and increased confidence and legitimacy in the business's social responsibility efforts are some of these mechanisms. These factors collectively influence consumer decision-making processes and drive purchasing behaviour in favour of the brand.

### **5.6.5 H5: Consumer scepticism moderates the relationship between brand equity and consumer purchase behaviour significantly.**

As part of the moderating effect, the study investigated the impact of consumer cynicism on BE and consumer purchasing behaviour. The study hypothesises that customer scepticism moderates the association between BE and consumer purchase behaviour. This hypothesis was rejected ( $p = 0.259$ , Table 5.4), implying that consumer scepticism did not attenuate the link between BE and consumer purchasing behaviour. In other words, the impact of BE on purchase behaviour varies according to the extent of consumer cynicism. Contrary to the literature, high levels of scepticism may weaken the influence of BE on purchasing behaviour, while low levels of scepticism may strengthen it. Thus, consumer scepticism, as a form of the subjective norm (Lins *et al.* 2024), can moderate the relationship between BE and purchasing behaviour.

This notion is supported by Higuera-Castillo *et al.* (2024), who found that product type and word of mouth can also moderate this relationship. Other studies suggest that consumer scepticism can influence evaluations of advertisements, particularly when combined with brand familiarity (Malhotra and Majchrzak 2014; Adil *et al.* 2024). While consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence may be influenced by scepticism, the tendency can also impact purchasing behaviour. Even though the hypothesis was not supported, extant studies (Adil *et al.* 2024; Higuera-Castillo *et al.* 2024; Lins *et al.* 2024; Louis and Lombart 2024) have corroborated the effect of scepticism on purchasing intentions. Louis and Lombart (2024) for instance submit that consumers are more sceptical of experience and subjective claims, while Lins *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that those susceptible to interpersonal influence are more likely to purchase products that lead to favourable attributions.

This implies consumer scepticism erodes trust and credibility in brands and companies. Thus, when consumers doubt the honesty or transparency of marketing claims, they are less likely to trust the information provided by brands. The consequence is that negative consumer scepticism affects trust in advertising messages, leading to decreased effectiveness of marketing efforts.

Suspicious customers are more inclined to transfer brands since they are less brand loyal. These customers frequently tend to quickly move on from brands that they believe to be dishonest or

unreliable in favour of ones that better suit their expectations and beliefs. As a result, the association between BE and purchasing activity is probably moderated in large part by consumer cynicism. Nevertheless, this proposition yielded a conflicting conclusion.

#### **5.6.6 H6: Consumer scepticism moderates the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour significantly.**

Lastly, the study examined how customer cynicism affected the association between CRM and consumer buying patterns. There was no acceptance of the hypothesis ( $p = 0.454$ , Table 5.4). Contrary to the research reviewed, this study suggests that customer cynicism moderates the link between CRM and consumer purchase behaviour (Malhotra and Fatehpuria 2024). According to Amawate and Deb (2021) and Mimouni Chaabane and Parguel (2016), respectively, consumer scepticism can diminish the warm-glow effect of CRM and influence patronage intention. Remarkably, the results of this investigation did not corroborate the claim.

The result implies that the level of consumer scepticism observed in the study was not substantial enough to significantly moderate the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour. Consumer scepticism varies across individuals and contexts, and in some cases, it may not exert a strong enough influence to moderate the effects of CRM on purchasing behaviour hence, the findings. Although CRM can enhance attitudes and purchase intentions, Suryavanshi et al. (2024) and Thomas et al. (2024) discovered that the impact is greater when customers are more engaged with the cause.

Furthermore, Bakari *et al.* (2024) concluded that consumer scepticism is negatively correlated with brand loyalty, indicating that sceptical consumers are more willing to switch brands. Consumer scepticism influences how consumers process information and make purchase decisions. Sceptical customers are more inclined to compare prices, conduct in-depth information searches, and rely on recommendations and peer reviews. They might examine product claims closely, look for proof of legitimacy, and assess brands according to their reputation and performance history. Lins *et al.* (2024) further showed that highly sceptical consumers base their attitudes on intrinsic beliefs, implying that more sceptical consumers respond more positively to emotional appeals in advertising. Malhotra and Fatehpuria (2024) found an association between consumer scepticism and increased perceived risk associated with purchasing decisions.

Sceptical customers may be reluctant to make purchases, especially if they have a greater level of doubt or scepticism about a product or brand. They are also more aware of potential dangers, covert intentions, and misleading promises made by brands (Malhotra and Fatehpuria, 2024). Sceptical customers are more inclined to use social media, internet reviews, and word-of-mouth to express their thoughts, feelings, and worries with others. Scepticism or unfavourable opinions about a brand can spread swiftly and affect other people's purchasing decisions. On the other hand, favourable experiences and impressions of openness and genuineness can improve a brand's standing and provide favourable social influence and word-of-mouth (Adil et al., 2024).

All of these results point to the importance of consumer scepticism in influencing purchasing decisions. Furthermore, although there is a positive association between brand loyalty and purchase intentions, Arshad et al. (2024) emphasised the negative and substantial relationship between customer cynicism and buying intentions. All of this research points to the possibility that consumer cynicism may mitigate the association between CRM and consumer purchase behaviour, with the degree of this moderation depending on variables like donation size and cause participation.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the chapter presented actual data demonstrating the connection between CRM characteristics and customer buying patterns. The results are more credible because of the measurement and structural models' robustness as well as the constructs' acceptable validity and reliability. These observations can help guide companies' CRM plans and add to the expanding corpus of research on the subject. The study's summary, conclusion, and recommendations are in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Data analysis and the study's findings were reported in the previous chapter. It demonstrated the validity and reliability of the constructs, the robustness of the measurement and structural models, and the empirical support for the association between CRM aspects and customer purchase behaviour. Along with recommendations for additional research and the study's ramifications, this chapter covers the goals and findings of the study. It contains a synopsis of the research, a list of its limitations, and suggestions.

#### **6.2 Discussion of the Study Objectives and Findings**

This section examines the objectives of the study and offers insights into how CRM influences the behaviour and perception of brands among Ghanaian consumers. It begins with an analysis of how customers view and feel about CRM, highlighting how cultural values, societal challenges, and authenticity influence their responses. Next, the important impacts of CRM on consumer behaviour are discussed, emphasising the improved brand loyalty and emotional bonds that result from true cause alignment. Also, the study examines BE's mediating role in the relationship between CRM and purchasing behaviour, emphasising how brand reputation and customer perceptions affect how effective CRM initiatives are. Lastly, the analysis concludes that scepticism has no discernible effect on BE or CRM. Additionally, it provides surprising information on the moderating effect of customer scepticism.

##### **6.2.1 To explore consumers' understanding and attitudes to cause-related marketing in Ghana**

By coordinating their marketing initiatives with social concerns, CRM has become a popular strategy for organisations looking to engage consumers. In Ghana, understanding consumer attitudes towards CRM is essential for effectively implementing these strategies and ensuring their success. This literature review synthesises recent findings on consumer perceptions and attitudes towards CRM in Ghana, highlighting key themes and insights. Studies reveal that many elements impact consumer perceptions of CRM, including the perceived genuineness of the brand's dedication to the cause, the cause's significance to the consumer, and the BE as a whole (Suriyanto et al. 2020). In Ghana, consumers tend to favour brands that demonstrate a

genuine engagement with local social issues, reflecting a preference for authenticity over superficial marketing tactics (Gonu, Wanapu and Withayagiat 2022). Customers are more inclined to support brands that they perceive to be improving society, which is consistent with research from other contexts (Chan 2023).

The findings suggest that Ghanaian consumers reward CRM activities that respond to urgent social issues, reflect their cultural values, and exhibit authenticity and openness. Ghanaian consumers are likely to be more loyal to brands that successfully interact with them, share information about their CSR efforts, and make significant contributions to society. To maximise their influence and efficacy, businesses must, however, comprehend the subtleties of the Ghanaian market and modify their CRM strategies appropriately.

While many consumers in Ghana may support the idea of CRM and appreciate brands' efforts to give back to society, their actual purchase decisions may be influenced by various factors beyond CSR initiatives. Price, quality, availability, and personal preferences still play significant roles in consumer decision-making processes. Like consumers worldwide, Ghanaian consumers place a high importance on honesty and authenticity in CRM initiatives. Campaigns that are open, trustworthy, and help to solve social or environmental problems are likely to get their support. Consumers may be sceptical of and hostile towards brands that participate in tokenistic or opportunistic CSR initiatives.

### **6.2.2 To determine the influence of cause-related marketing on consumer purchase behaviour.**

CRM's emotional connection is a major factor in its influence on consumer behaviour. According to He et al. (2016), CRM is an effective technique to connect with consumers on an emotional level, which can lead to increased brand image, distinctiveness, and additional value. CRM may strengthen the link between a company and its customers by appealing to their emotions and beliefs, ultimately driving purchasing decisions. In conclusion, the existing research identifies various aspects that influence CRM's influence on consumer purchase behaviour, including the nature of the marketed product, the perceived fit between the product and cause, customer scepticism, and the emotional connection generated by CRM. To maximise their influence on customer attitudes and purchase decisions, marketers must carefully take these factors into account when developing and putting into practice their CRM strategy.

The literature review findings show that CRM significantly influences consumers' purchasing behaviour. CRM allows consumers to support causes they care about through their purchasing decisions. Customers may be more likely to buy goods or services from a company they believe supports a specific social or environmental cause to support cause after making that perception. The results of the current study showed that CRM initiatives frequently cause consumers to react emotionally. CRM campaigns can establish emotional bonds with customers by linking a company to a worthwhile cause, which will boost brand attachment, affinity, and loyalty. Additionally, when customers believe that their purchases will significantly advance the cause they support, they are more inclined to support CRM campaigns. CRM programs help improve a brand's reputation and image among customers. Customers are more likely to buy products or services from brands that support causes they care about because they perceive these brands as socially responsible and actively involved in addressing societal issues. CRM initiatives can influence consumers' purchase intentions by appealing to their values, beliefs, and desire to positively impact society.

### **6.2.3 To establish the mediation role of BE in the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour**

Brands exploit their affiliation with social causes to boost sales and improve their brand image, demonstrating that CRM influences consumer purchasing behaviour (Suriyanto et al. 2020). Nonetheless, there is a complicated relationship between CRM and consumer behaviour, which BE frequently mediates. The value that a brand adds to a good or service is known as brand equity, and it has a big influence on how customers think about and decide what to buy. In conclusion, the body of research indicates that BE significantly mediates the relationship between CRM and customer purchase behaviour. Brands may strengthen their emotional bonds with customers, raise perceived quality, and eventually boost sales by improving BE through CRM initiatives. However, the effectiveness of this relationship is contingent upon factors such as perceived fit and consumer scepticism.

Consequently, in this study, BE acts as a mediator in the interaction between CRM and consumer buying habits. The results of this study imply that BE mediates the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour by affecting consumers' perceptions, feelings, loyalty, trust, perceived value, and brand distinction. Brands that effectively leverage CRM initiatives to enhance BE can drive positive consumer responses and behaviours, leading

to increased sales, loyalty, and long-term relationships with consumers. Brand equity encompasses consumers' perceptions of a brand, including its reputation, trustworthiness, and perceived quality. When a brand engages in CRM, it may enhance its image as a socially responsible and caring organisation. Consumers who perceive the brand positively are more likely to support its CRM initiatives and make purchases from the brand.

#### **6.2.4 To identify the moderating role of customer scepticism on the relationship between brand equity and consumer purchase behaviour.**

Marketers looking to increase sales and brand loyalty must comprehend how consumer scepticism moderates the relationship between BE and consumer purchase behaviour. Brand equity, which is the value that a product adds by having a well-known brand name, has a big impact on what customers decide to buy (Aaker 1991). Consumer cynicism, which is defined as a lack of confidence in the brand's claims and intentions, can, nevertheless, change how BE influences consumer behaviour. A key mitigating factor in this dynamic is consumer cynicism. High degrees of cynicism can reduce BE's beneficial effects on consumer behaviour. Customers who doubt a brand's statements are less inclined to trust it, which may result in less buy intent, assert Kim and Oh (2020). This scepticism can stem from past experiences, perceived inconsistencies in brand messaging, or a general distrust of marketing practices (Dunn and Harness 2018). Research indicates that the interaction between BE and consumer scepticism can significantly influence purchasing behaviour. Chen et al. (2023) discovered, for instance, that when customers have high BE perceptions, their scepticism might be reduced, which increases their propensity to buy. Conversely, when scepticism is high, even strong BE may not be sufficient to encourage purchases (Yu *et al.* 2018). This suggests that brands must not only focus on building equity but also address consumer scepticism through transparent communication and authentic engagement.

Regarding consumer scepticism's moderating function, the study discovered that it did not affect the association between consumer behaviour and consumer BE. Given that previous research has shown that customer cynicism strongly moderates BE and purchasing behaviour, these results were surprising.

#### **6.2.5 To establish the moderating role of consumer scepticism in the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchase behaviour.**

Consumer scepticism toward CRM arises from concerns about the authenticity of a brand's

commitment to social causes. Research by Thomas and Kureshi (2020) highlights that increased consumer awareness of CRM initiatives can lead to heightened scepticism, particularly if consumers perceive the marketing efforts as insincere or primarily profit-driven. This scepticism can act as a barrier to effective CRM, as consumers may be less inclined to purchase from brands they do not trust. Studies have shown that CRM can positively influence consumer purchasing behaviour when executed authentically. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns is moderated by consumer scepticism. For instance, Amawate and Deb (2019) found that scepticism significantly impacts consumers' future buying intentions and patronage behaviours. When consumers are sceptical, even well-designed CRM campaigns may fail to resonate, leading to reduced purchase intentions.

It can be concluded that consumer scepticism does not moderate the relationship between CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour because, as with objective four (4), the study findings did not demonstrate any significant relationship between the moderator, consumer scepticism, and CRM and consumer purchasing behaviour.

#### **6.2.6 To develop a model for Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Purchasing Behaviour: Consumer Scepticism as Moderator and Brand Equity as Mediator.**

The proposed model of CRM and consumer behaviour and the mediating role of BE is presented in Figure 3.2.

### **6.1 Implications of the Study**

#### **6.1.1 Theoretical Implications**

This study provides focused theoretical contributions by integrating attribution theory with Aaker's BE model to deepen the understanding of CRM and its influence on consumer purchasing behaviour. Attribution theory offers a lens to analyze how consumers perceive and assign motives to companies' CRM initiatives, which significantly affects their purchase decisions. Specifically, this study examines how consumers attribute either altruistic or self-serving motivations to CRM campaigns and the subsequent impact these attributions have on their purchasing intentions. By doing so, it advances theoretical knowledge on the psychological mechanisms driving consumer responses to CRM.

The incorporation of Aaker's BE model further refines the analysis by linking CRM activities to key brand equity dimensions brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and

brand loyalty. This connection highlights how CRM can enhance these dimensions, thereby strengthening overall brand equity. For instance, CRM campaigns that align closely with consumer values and perceptions can foster stronger emotional connections, increase brand loyalty, and improve perceived quality. These insights contribute to the literature by demonstrating how CRM not only influences immediate purchasing behaviour but also builds long-term brand equity.

By combining attribution theory with Aaker's BE model, this study provides a novel framework for understanding CRM's dual impact: influencing consumer purchasing behaviour in the short term and enhancing brand equity in the long term. This theoretical integration underscores the importance of aligning CRM initiatives with consumer attributions to maximize their effectiveness. For example, campaigns perceived as genuinely supporting social causes are more likely to elicit positive consumer responses and drive purchase intentions compared to those seen as opportunistic.

Additionally, this study emphasizes the strategic implications for marketers seeking to optimize CRM campaigns. By understanding how attribution theory shapes consumer perceptions and how these perceptions interact with BE dimensions, marketers can design more targeted and impactful CRM strategies. This research encourages further exploration into the combined application of attribution theory and BE models in other marketing contexts, such as corporate social responsibility or sustainability initiatives.

### **6.1.2 Practical Implications**

This study yields several focused practical implications for marketing managers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their CRM initiatives while strengthening brand equity. First, the findings underscore the critical importance of strategic alignment between corporate social initiatives and core brand identity. Marketers should carefully evaluate cause-brand fit during campaign development, ensuring selected social causes authentically reflect the brand's values and market positioning. The analysis suggests that well-aligned CRM programs not only generate more favorable consumer responses but also contribute more substantially to long-term brand equity development.

Second, the research highlights the need for transparent communication strategies in CRM implementation. Marketing practitioners should prioritize clear disclosure of campaign

parameters, including the nature of corporate contributions and measurable social impact. Such transparency helps mitigate consumer scepticism while reinforcing perceptions of brand authenticity. The study further recommends incorporating longitudinal cause commitment into messaging, as sustained involvement with social issues appears more credible to consumers than one-off campaigns.

Third, the findings provide specific guidance for brand equity enhancement through CRM. Marketing managers should design campaigns that simultaneously address multiple brand equity dimensions, with particular emphasis on emotional brand associations and perceived quality. This can be achieved by creating participatory consumer experiences that connect product usage with social impact, rather than relying solely on transactional donation models. The results indicate that experiential CRM activations foster deeper emotional engagement with both the cause and the brand. For digital implementation, the study suggests leveraging user-generated content to amplify CRM messages, as peer perspectives often carry greater credibility than corporate communications. Social media strategies should facilitate consumer participation in cause-related storytelling while maintaining consistent brand messaging across platforms.

Finally, the research underscores the importance of cultural adaptation in global CRM strategies. Marketers operating in international markets should tailor campaign framing to align with local cultural values, emphasizing community benefits in collectivist societies while highlighting individual impact in more individualistic cultures. This nuanced approach maximizes both campaign effectiveness and brand equity returns across diverse markets. These implications offer marketing practitioners a strategic framework for CRM development that balances immediate campaign objectives with long-term brand building. By implementing these evidence-based recommendations, organizations can optimize both the social and commercial returns on their CRM investments while strengthening their overall market position.

### **6.1.3 Implications for Policy**

This study yields several critical policy implications for fostering effective CRM implementation in emerging economies, with particular relevance to Ghana's socioeconomic context. First, the findings suggest that regulatory frameworks should be developed to standardize CRM disclosure practices. Government agencies such as Ghana's National

Communications Authority could establish clear guidelines requiring businesses to transparently communicate the parameters of their CRM initiatives, including the specific nature of corporate contributions and measurable social outcomes. Such regulation would enhance accountability while mitigating consumer skepticism.

Second, the research highlights the need for policy incentives to encourage authentic corporate social engagement. Fiscal measures including targeted tax incentives could be structured to reward companies that demonstrate sustained, rather than opportunistic, commitment to social causes. The study recommends these incentives be tiered according to the demonstrable social impact and strategic alignment of CRM programs with national development priorities.

Third, the findings underscore the importance of consumer education in CRM ecosystems. Policymakers should collaborate with educational institutions to develop public awareness campaigns that enhance consumer understanding of ethical consumption and CRM mechanisms. Such initiatives would create more informed markets capable of distinguishing between authentic social initiatives and corporate greenwashing.

For small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the study suggests the development of specialized support programs. Government agencies could facilitate SME participation in CRM through capacity-building workshops that address both the strategic design of cause-related initiatives and their integration with core business operations. Public-private partnerships might further provide access to impact measurement tools tailored to resource-constrained businesses. The research also contributes to institutionalizing monitoring and evaluation frameworks for CRM initiatives. Regulatory bodies could mandate standardized impact reporting that assesses both commercial outcomes for businesses and social benefits for communities. This dual focus would ensure CRM maintains its strategic balance between corporate and societal value creation.

Finally, the study proposes the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms where businesses, NGOs, and government agencies can collaborate on large-scale social issues through coordinated CRM efforts. Such platforms could help align corporate social investments with national development goals while preventing duplication of efforts across sectors.

These policy recommendations aim to create an enabling environment where CRM can fulfill

its potential as both a business strategy and vehicle for social progress. By implementing these evidence-based suggestions, policymakers can stimulate responsible marketing practices that contribute to sustainable economic development while building consumer trust in corporate social initiatives.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

### **6.2.1 Recommendations for Further Research**

This study identifies several actionable research directions that would advance both academic knowledge and industry practice in CRM. First, the study recommends a three-phase ethnographic study combining shop-along observations with in-depth interviews to decode how consumers process CRM messages across different retail environments. This approach would provide marketers with concrete insights into real-time decision-making processes, enabling more effective CRM message placement and design. Second, a cross-cultural experimental research program to systematically test CRM effectiveness variations is proposed. This could involve controlled testing of identical CRM campaigns across multiple markets, using standardized measurement protocols to isolate cultural moderators. Such research would equip multinational corporations with empirically-validated frameworks for localizing CRM strategies while maintaining global brand consistency.

For longitudinal analysis, the study suggests establishing an industry-academic CRM observatory that tracks campaign performance metrics alongside brand equity indicators over 3-5 year cycles. This would provide the empirical basis for developing predictive models of CRM's long-term brand-building effects, addressing current gaps in understanding the temporal dimensions of CRM ROI.

Finally, the study recommends developing an integrated CRM evaluation toolkit incorporating neuroscientific measures (eye-tracking, facial coding) with traditional surveys. This mixed-methods approach would yield both conscious and subconscious consumer response data, giving marketers a more complete picture of CRM effectiveness. Pilot testing could focus on high-value product categories where purchase decisions involve significant emotional engagement. These research pathways offer practical, methodologically rigorous approaches to addressing key knowledge gaps while delivering immediately applicable insights for marketing practitioners.

### **6.2.2 Recommendations for Policy Makers and Regulators:**

This study proposes three concrete policy interventions to enhance the effectiveness and integrity of CRM in Ghana's business environment. First, the study recommends the establishment of a CRM Certification Program under the Ghana Standards Authority, which would develop and enforce standardized disclosure requirements for all cause-marketing campaigns. This program should mandate specific formatting for CRM disclosures, including standardized icons indicating the percentage of proceeds donated, duration of campaigns, and clear beneficiary information. The certification process would involve pre-campaign review of marketing materials and post-campaign audits to verify fulfillment of promises, with non-compliant organizations facing public listing on a national registry.

Second, the study proposes the creation of a Public-Private CRM Oversight Committee comprising representatives from the National Communications Authority, Advertising Association of Ghana, consumer advocacy groups, and leading CSR-focused corporations. This committee would serve three key functions: developing industry-specific CRM guidelines, reviewing controversial campaigns through an independent ethics panel, and maintaining a public database of certified CRM initiatives. The committee should implement a tiered review system where high-risk campaigns (those involving sensitive causes or targeting vulnerable populations) undergo mandatory pre-approval, while standard campaigns follow a post-campaign reporting system.

Third, the study advocates for a structured incentive framework to encourage authentic CRM participation, particularly among SMEs. This should include tax deductions scaled to campaign transparency scores, government procurement preference for certified CRM-active businesses, and an annual National CSR Marketplace that matches corporations with vetted non-profit partners. The Ghana Investment Promotion Centre could administer these incentives through an integrated scoring system that evaluates both the social impact of CRM initiatives and their alignment with national development priorities.

These recommendations provide actionable pathways for transforming CRM from an optional marketing tactic into a regulated, impactful component of Ghana's business ecosystem. By implementing these measures, policymakers can simultaneously protect consumers, encourage

ethical business practices, and amplify the social benefits of corporate marketing expenditures. The proposed systems balance necessary regulation with business-friendly implementation, creating an environment where authentic social-purpose marketing flourishes while deceptive practices are systematically identified and addressed.

### **6.2.3 Recommendations for Marketers and Businesses**

This study yields several actionable recommendations for businesses seeking to optimize their cause-related marketing strategies while building authentic brand equity. The implementation framework presented here addresses both strategic planning and tactical execution, providing marketers with concrete steps to enhance CRM effectiveness.

For transparency in social cause communication, the study recommends adopting a three-tiered disclosure system across all marketing channels. First, develop a dedicated "Social Impact" microsite that documents the company's long-term commitment to partnered causes, including detailed timelines, financial contributions, and measurable outcomes. Second, implement standardized CRM labeling on all product packaging and advertisements using a recognizable icon system that immediately communicates the percentage of proceeds donated and the campaign duration. Third, establish quarterly impact reporting through concise video updates featuring both corporate representatives and nonprofit partners. This multi-channel approach ensures that consumers encounter consistent, verifiable information at multiple touchpoints.

Regarding brand-cause alignment, marketers should conduct a four-phase compatibility assessment before launching any CRM initiative. Begin with a brand archetype analysis to identify core personality traits and values. Follow with a cause mapping exercise to identify social issues that naturally align with these traits. Then, execute a consumer values audit through focus groups to verify perceived fit. Finally, conduct a competitive gap analysis to identify underserved cause areas within your industry. This process ensures strategic differentiation while maintaining authenticity. For example, an outdoor apparel brand might identify environmental conservation as an optimal fit after completing this assessment, while consciously avoiding overused causes in their sector.

To build meaningful nonprofit partnerships, the study proposes a Partnership Development Framework consisting of five implementation stages. Initiate with an immersion period where corporate employees volunteer with potential partner organizations. Progress to a pilot project

co-created with the nonprofit to test collaboration dynamics. Formalize the relationship through multi-year agreements with predefined KPIs. Implement employee exchange programs to foster deeper organizational understanding. Finally, establish joint advisory boards to guide ongoing initiatives. This approach moves beyond transactional sponsorships to create truly embedded social partnerships.

For measuring CRM impact, marketers should deploy an integrated analytics system combining three measurement streams. First, implement brand tracking surveys with pre- and post-campaign waves to isolate shifts in brand equity dimensions. Second, utilize natural language processing of social media conversations to assess sentiment changes. Third, integrate cause-specific promo codes and dedicated landing pages to precisely track campaign-influenced purchases. This triangulated approach provides both attitudinal and behavioral metrics while controlling for external variables.

To maintain CRM relevance, the study recommends establishing a Social Trends Advisory Council comprising representatives from marketing, consumer insights, corporate social responsibility, and external futurists. This group should conduct quarterly environmental scans using a standardized PESTEL framework (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal) to identify emerging social issues. Supplement this with ongoing social listening through specialized software monitoring cause-related conversations across digital platforms. These insights should feed into an agile CRM development process with biannual strategy refreshes.

For consumer engagement, develop a participatory CRM model that moves beyond passive donation mechanisms. Create cause-related co-creation platforms where consumers can directly contribute ideas or volunteer efforts. Implement blockchain-based transparency systems allowing consumers to track the impact of their purchases in real-time. Develop gamified CRM experiences that reward ongoing consumer participation rather than one-time transactions. These innovations deepen emotional connections while providing tangible proof of impact.

Regarding internal alignment, the study proposes a comprehensive employee activation program to ensure organizational authenticity. This includes CRM immersion training for

customer-facing staff, departmental impact challenges with recognition programs, and structured storytelling platforms where employees can share personal experiences with the partnered causes. When employees become genuine ambassadors, consumer perceptions of authenticity increase significantly. For budget allocation, adopt an effective framework where sufficient funds are allocated to CRM resources to support established long-term partnerships, fund emerging cause experimentation, and support rapid-response initiatives for urgent social issues. This balanced approach maintains consistency while allowing for strategic flexibility.

Finally, to future-proof CRM strategies, marketers should establish a continuous learning system incorporating post-campaign retrospectives, competitor benchmarking, and annual consumer perception audits. This institutionalizes improvement processes and ensures CRM initiatives evolve with changing market expectations. By implementing these concrete strategies, businesses can transform CRM from a tactical marketing tool into a core driver of brand equity and consumer loyalty. The recommendations provide specific, actionable guidance while maintaining the flexibility needed for adaptation across industries and organizational contexts. This framework enables marketers to achieve both social impact and business results through authentic, well-executed cause-related initiatives.

### **6.3 Limitations of the Study**

Regardless of its objectives, every research study has limitations. The researcher notes certain limitations that other scholars may address in future research because the study is restricted to Ghana. Because there are so many different political, environmental, social, technological, environmental, and legal quirks that may need to be taken into account, it is important to proceed cautiously when generalising the results across nations.

Also, there are variations in the business dynamism of the various countries. Again, the study only considered research constructs from the viewpoints of consumers; it did not consider the staff replies from the selected shopping centres, which could have yielded useful information. Last but not least, the dissertation was limited by its neglect of other malls located in different towns and cities. Lastly, using only the quantitative method also poses a limitation since the adoption of a qualitative approach could have also added some important insights into the findings.

Consumer cynicism as a moderator on the relationship between CRM and consumer purchase behaviour may not have the same effects on all customers or product categories. BE might not be able to completely mediate the relationship between CRM and consumer purchase behaviour because other crucial elements like product quality, pricing, and competing offerings also play a big part. There may be differences in the relationship that exists between CRM, consumer scepticism, BE, and purchasing behaviour among different industries, product categories, and consumer segments. Variables that can impact the effectiveness of CRM initiatives, as well as the impact of BE and consumer scepticism, include cultural differences, market conditions, and the specifics of the cause being supported. Results from CRM and consumer behaviour research should therefore be cautiously generalised, accounting for any contextual factors that may influence the findings.

Furthermore, the use of a single sampling strategy limits the capacity to generalise results to other demographic groups that might have varying degrees of brand loyalty, scepticism, or views on the efficacy of CRM. For example, high-income earners may prioritise brand equity (BE) differently than lower-income groups, and younger consumers may react differently to CRM campaigns than older consumers. Researchers should think about using stratified or random sampling procedures to guarantee a more representative consumer base in order to increase the robustness and applicability of future studies. Future research could also use longitudinal data collection techniques to track how perceptions of CRM, scepticism, and brand equity change over time, especially in reaction to significant CSR initiatives or changes in the economy.

The geographic scope of this investigation is yet another significant drawback. Although the study offers insightful information about Ghanaian consumer behaviour and cause-related marketing (CRM), it only looks at two of the sixteen regions in the nation. Because customer views and behaviours about CRM might fluctuate greatly across different locations due to economic, cultural, and infrastructure differences, the findings' limited geographical coverage limits their generalisability. With regional differences in wealth levels, educational attainment, urbanisation, and exposure to corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, Ghana is a diverse nation. For example, rural customers in the Northern or Volta areas, who can be less exposed to corporate-driven social initiatives, might perceive brand equity and scepticism differently than metropolitan consumers in Accra and Takoradi, where the majority of CRM programs are actively marketed.

Furthermore, customers in areas with robust local community networks might be more likely to believe in cause-related marketing initiatives that reflect their social ideals, whereas consumers in areas where corporate intentions are seen with greater scepticism might be more dubious. Thus, even though this study offers a valuable starting point for comprehending how CRM affects Ghanaian consumers' purchase decisions, care must be taken when extrapolating the findings outside of the particular areas examined. Future studies' external validity would be improved by broadening the geographic scope, providing a more comprehensive understanding of CRM's influence on consumer behaviour in a variety of markets.

#### **6.4 Summary of the Study**

With BE acting as a mediator and customer cynicism acting as a moderator, the study sought to determine the impact of CRM on consumer purchase behaviour. The study's theoretical underpinnings are the attribution and Aaker's brand equity model theories. The study employed a quantitative strategy to gather data through the use of a survey or questionnaire. Customers from two retail malls in Takoradi and Accra, respectively, made up the research population. The author developed and evaluated a conceptual framework to meet the study's goals. The study employed convenience sampling to choose participants.

The study's sample size was 500 people from the entire population. Bernardi and Nash (2023) proposed that respondents' innate secrecy should persuade people to be honest and forthright in their responses, therefore, structured questionnaires were self-administered to collect data for this study. The data was analysed using PLS-SEM and SPSS statistical tools, which are types of inferential and descriptive statistics. The research was based on six main goals. Six hypotheses were ultimately put forth in the study; two were rejected, and four were approved.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE

**ENVISION2030** transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability  
fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence



#### LIST OF QUESTIONS

##### Part A: Demographic information

Please tick in the boxes provided where appropriate:

1	<b>Gender</b>	Male	Female			
2	<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	Single	Divorced		
3	<b>Status</b>	Student	Worker	Unemployed		
4	<b>Age</b>	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	
5	<b>Educational Background</b>	Secondary	Tertiary	Postgraduate	Other	

##### B. Exploring consumers understanding and attitude towards Cause-Related Marketing.

The following acronyms represent the following:

**SD:** Strongly Disagree **D:** Disagree **NAD:** Neither Agree nor Disagree **A:** Agree **SA:** Strongly Agree

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement.

SN	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements.	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
6	My knowledge of Cause-Related Marketing is extremely high.					

	My understanding of Cause-Related Marketing is extremely high.					
8	My attitude toward firms participating in Cause-Related Marketing campaigns is extremely positive.					
9	My attitude towards Non-Profit Organizations engaging in Cause-Related Marketing is extremely positive.					
10	In general, my feelings towards brands supportive of causes are very pleasant.					
11	In general, my feelings towards brands supportive of causes are very favourable.					
12	In general, my feelings towards brands supportive of causes are very desirable.					
13	In general, my feelings towards brands supportive of causes are very likable.					

**C. Establishing the mediating role of brand equity on the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour (Dimensions of Brand Equity)**

SN	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements.	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
14	Brand Awareness - I can easily recognize a brand that is related to a campaign for a cause among other competing brands.					
15	A product that donates to a cause is a brand of product I am very familiar with.					
16	When I think of a product a cause-related brand is one of the brands that comes to mind.					
17	Brand Association - I trust the company that owns this particular brand.					
18	Some characteristics of a cause-related brand come to my mind quickly.					
19	I can quickly recall the symbols or logo of a brand that donates to a cause.					

20	Brand Loyalty- A brand would be my first choice if it donates to support a cause or causes.					
21	I consider myself to be loyal to a brand that donates to support a cause or causes.					
22	I will not buy other brands if a cause-related brand is available.					
23	Perceived Quality - In comparison to alternative brands, the likely quality of a cause-related brand is extremely high.					
24	Cause-related brands offer products with consistent quality.					
25	Brands that donate to support causes offer very reliable products.					

**D. Establishing the moderating role of Customer Scepticism on the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour**

	<b>Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements.</b>	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
SN						
26	Most statements made by companies in advertising or product labels about supporting non-profit organizations are not true.					
27	Most statements made by companies in advertising or on product labels about supporting non-profit organizations are intended to mislead rather than inform the consumer.					
28	Because most statements made by companies that support non-profit organizations are exaggerated, consumers would be better off if such statements were eliminated from advertising or package labels.					
29	I do not believe most statements regarding the support of non-profit organizations are made by organizations in advertising or on package labels.					

30	It is considered positive in the community to have participated in The Non-Profit Organisation.					
31	The company sponsors the cause to persuade consumers to buy its product.					
32	The company sponsors the cause because ultimately it cares about its profit.					
33	The company sponsors the cause because sponsorship creates a positive corporate image.					
34	The company will take advantage of the non-profit organisation to help its own business.					

**E. The Influence of Cause-Related Marketing on Patronage Intention or Purchasing Behaviour.**

SN	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements.	SD	D	NAD	A	SA
35	I will speak favourably of the company that supports a cause or causes for others.					
36	I will encourage others to attend events promoted by a company that supports a cause or causes.					
37	I will encourage others to support a company that supports a cause or causes.					
38	I am eager to learn more about a product which is related to a campaign for a cause.					
39	I would be willing to pay a higher price for a product from a firm which campaigns for a cause than a product from a firm which does not.					
40	. I am likely to participate in a campaign for a cause by purchasing the product.					

41	I would be willing to influence others to purchase a cause-related product.					
42	I would be willing to purchase a cause-related product.					
43	I would consider purchasing from a firm, which donates to a cause to help it.					
44	The company sponsors the cause because ultimately it cares about its customers.					
45	The company has a long-term interest in the community.					
46	The company wants to make it easier for consumers who care about the social cause to support it.					
47	The company is trying to give something back to the community.					
48	The company integrates philanthropic contributions into its business activities.					

**APPENDIX E: OUTER MODEL DESCRIPTIVES**

**Discriminant validity**

**Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – Matrix**

Constructs	Brand-Equity	CR-Marketing	Consumer-Scep	Purchase-Beha	Consumer-Scep x Brand-Equity	Consumer-Scep x CR-Marketing
Brand-Equity						
CR-Marketing	0.584					
Consumer-Scep	0.584	0.444				
Purchase-Beha	0.798	0.558	0.528			
Consumer-Scep x Brand-Equity	0.353	0.160	0.201	0.334		
Consumer-Scep x CR-Marketing	0.157	0.219	0.157	0.231	0.607	

<u>Confidence intervals</u>				
Constructs	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	2.5%	97.5%
Brand-Equity -> Purchase-Beha	0.503	0.500	0.373	0.618
CR-Marketing -> Brand-Equity	0.492	0.502	0.399	0.597
CR-Marketing -> Purchase-Beha	0.161	0.161	0.053	0.267
Consumer-Scep -> Purchase-Beha	0.133	0.142	0.052	0.238
Consumer-Scep x Brand-Equity -> Purchase-Beha	-0.057	-0.068	-0.167	0.028
Consumer-Scep x CR-Marketing -> Purchase-Beha	-0.040	-0.033	-0.138	0.074

## APPENDIX F: EDITING CERTIFICATE

### DR RICHARD STEELE

BA HDE MTech(Hom)

#### HOMEOPATH

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## EDITING CERTIFICATE

Re: **GEORGE DOMINIC EWUR (22174971)**

For editing DUT doctoral thesis: **CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING AND CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR: CONSUMER SCEPTICISM AS A MODERATOR AND BRAND EQUITY AS A MEDIATOR**

I confirm that I have edited this thesis and the references for clarity and language. I returned the document to the author with track changes so correct implementation of the changes and clarifications requested in the text and references is the responsibility of the author. I am a freelance editor specialising in proofreading and editing academic documents. My original tertiary degree which I obtained at the University of Cape Town was a B.A. with English as a major and I went on to complete an H.D.E. (P.G.) Sec. with English as my teaching subject. I was a part-time lecturer in the Department of Homoeopathy at the Durban University of Technology for 13 years and supervised many master's degree dissertations during that period.

Dr Richard Steele

**19 September 2024**

*per email*

## APPENDIX G: PROOF OF RESTRATION



### PROOF OF REGISTRATION To Whom It May Concern

13-Feb-2024

It is hereby confirmed that the under mentioned person is a registered student at DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY.

**Surname:** EWUR  
**Student Number:** 22174971  
**Registration Year:** 2024  
**Block:** POST-GRAD ANNUAL REGISTRATIONS  
**Department:** MARKETING AND RETAIL MNGT

**First Names:** GEORGE DOMINIC  
**Qualification:** DPMKT1 D PHIL MAN SCIENCES (MARKETING)  
**Offering Type:** Durban Campus Full-time  
**Period of Study:** Study period 4  
**Faculty:** FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

Subject	Description	PreReq/Exp	Block	Class Group	Offering Type	Exam Year	Exam Month	Cancel	Amount
	Registration Fees/Levies P0 POST-GRAD ANNUAL REGISTRATIONS								6210.00
RPMK641	RESEARCH PROJECT & DISSERTATION (4TH DREG)		P0	A	D1	2024	11	N	0.00
								Subtotal:	6210.00
								Total:	6210.00

\* Subjects with Requisites will be cancelled if the requisite rules are not met in mid-year exams. Refer to Department handbook.

Outstanding Balance: 47213.00

Please verify and rectify the above registration details with the Faculty Office to avoid academic and financial penalties before the dates published in the General handbook.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Faculty Officer

I, George Dominic Ewur (22174971) hereby confirm the above-mentioned documents have been submitted to the Faculty Research Officer accordingly along with the PDF Final signed Bound Thesis/ dissertation for Examination.

I acknowledge that in the event of a Pass, I will **only** be eligible for graduation upon satisfying the Minimum Duration Rule G25 (2)(a) or Rule G24 (2)(a)

**Rule G25(2)(a) – Applicable to a Doctoral Study**

*(2) Minimum and maximum duration*

*(a) The minimum duration for a Doctoral Degree shall be two consecutive academic years of registered study.*

**Rule G24(2)(a) – Applicable to a Masters Study**

*(2) Minimum and maximum duration*

*(a) The minimum duration for a Master’s Degree shall be one academic year of registered study.*

**Student signature:**

**Date:** 01/04/ 2025

**Supervisor signature:**

**Date:**

**FRO signature:**

**Date:**

